

GOETHE

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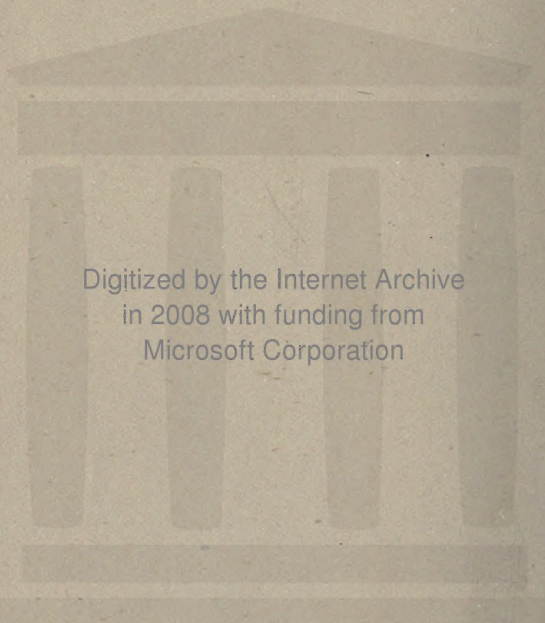
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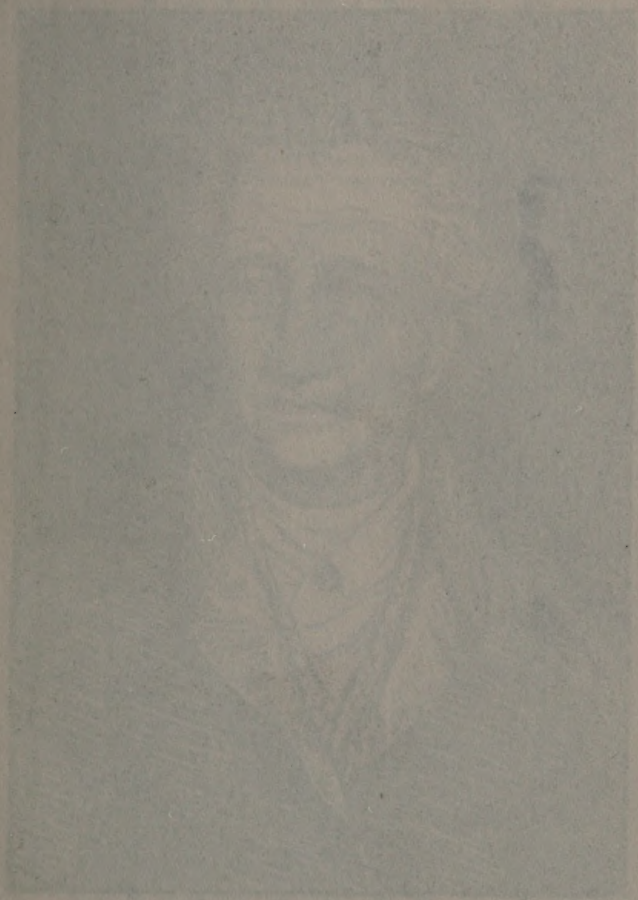
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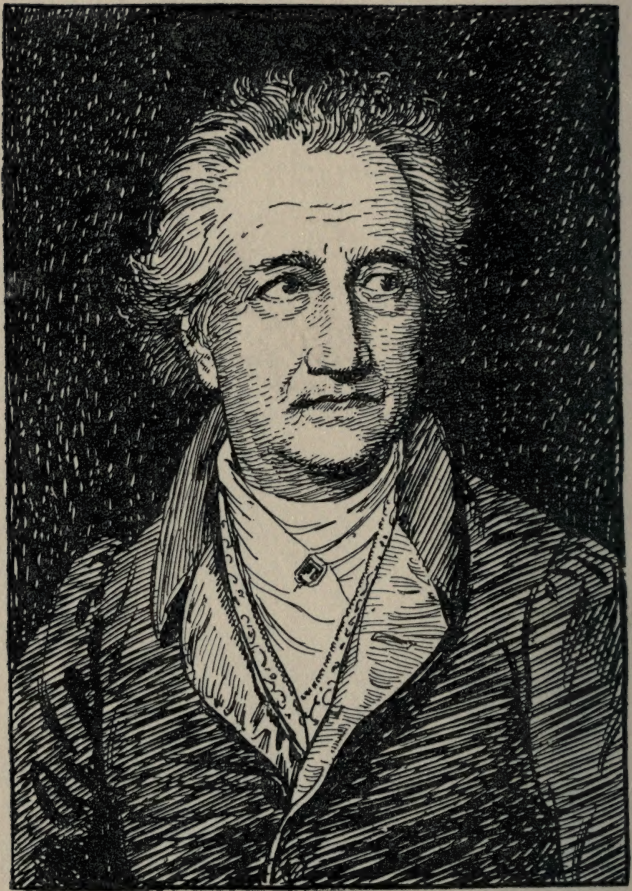
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# GOETHE

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TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
ERICH SCHMIDT  
DISCOVERER OF THE "URFAUST" AND FIRST  
DIRECTOR OF THE GOETHE-ARCHIV  
AT WEIMAR





## PREFACE

THE attempt to give an account of Goethe in some ninety small pages may well be counted as hazardous an enterprise as any to which the present adventurous series has given rise. His writings, in the final "Weimar" edition, occupy far more than a hundred volumes. He combined, in a hardly equalled degree, versatility of talent with the original power and quality of mind which makes a man's slightest work important. The present little book is no compendium of facts about Goethe. Entire aspects of his activity are passed over with the briefest notice; a vast number of his poems and the great majority of his prose pieces are ignored. But room has thus been gained for, first, a concise, but it is hoped not bald, account of his life; secondly, short critical studies of a representative selection of his lyric and narrative poems, his novels and dramas, in particular of *Faust*; thirdly, a summary of the practical and philosophical wisdom for which Carlyle and Arnold have made Goethe's name, among us, in some degree a synonym.

The titles of books have been sometimes retained, sometimes translated, according to circumstances, without any attempt at formal consistency.

Everyone who writes upon Goethe must incur a debt to the admirable German Lives, and to some portion at least of the immense and ever growing number of critical studies. Besides Bielschowsky's life and that, less widely known but in some respects superior, by R. M. Meyer (which ought to be translated), the present writer has used with advantage the various Goethe studies of Scherer, Erich Schmidt, Hermann Grimm, Viktor Hehn, and for the last section the indispensable books of Schrenpf (*Goethe's Lebensanschauung in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*) and O. Harnack (*Goethe in der Epoche seiner Vollendung*).

I am indebted to my friend Professor Breul of Cambridge, for kindly reading the first chapter in proof.

I have ventured to dedicate this little book to the memory of the distinguished Goethe scholar whose death has just been announced.

C. H. H.

MANCHESTER,  
May 1st.

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# GOETHE

## CHAPTER I

### LIFE

IF the genius and nature of the German people, in their full scope, are reflected in any single German mind, it is in that of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The imperial city of Frankfurt, where, on August 28, 1749, he saw the light, was well fitted to be the birthplace of such a man. The old Frankish capital stood on the border-line between the serious and strenuous North German and the expansive, light-living Southerner; and its patrician class, virtually autocratic, but not of noble blood, mediated similarly between the mass of unenfranchised citizens and the nobility of other states. Both contrasts met in Goethe's parents. His father's forbears came from the north, where they had been craftsmen or innkeepers; his mother's, the Textors, had been jurists in the south. Her father, at the time of the marriage, was *bürgermeister* of Frankfurt.

What Goethe owed to his ancestry he has told us in some delightful and well-known verses: "From my father I have my stature and my serious conduct of life, from *Mütterchen* my joyous nature and love of story-making." Of the two the "Frau Rath" stood far nearer to her son. She was an incomparable poet's mother. His first playmate (she was but eighteen at his birth), then his closest comrade, all the freshness and *naïveté* of the young girl were mated in her with

the shrewd wit and large heart of ripe womanhood, and she left all who met her better as well as happier than she found them. The father was less gifted. Iron industry and iron will had enabled the innkeeper's son to become a jurist of repute, a collector and connoisseur in art and letters, a counsellor of the empire, and the husband, on equal terms, of a patrician's daughter. But his rule over household and children was pedantically rigid, his notion of education as "systematic," as abstract, and as little illuminated by insight into childhood, as that of Squire Feverel himself. Yet, without the heritage of his will and industry, of his fundamental seriousness, the soaring imagination and the inextinguishable ardours of the son might have missed their supreme achievement, or even brought him to utter collapse.

In the spacious home upon the Hirschgraben young Wolfgang spent a happy childhood, described by himself with epic ease and amplitude, half a century later, in the first six books of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. There are few signs in it of the profound originality of mind disclosed in the parallel record of Wordsworth's *Prelude*. Not epoch-making genius, but brilliant and versatile talent, seems to be announced in this boy, who could do whatever he tried, and whose verses and tales were not more remarkable than his quick appropriation of English and Italian, or his precocious criticism of the Old Testament. A sheltered, secure existence, more favourable to culture than to character, untouched by sharper discipline than an uncongenial task, and stirred only by the more sensational events of the great world without—the Lisbon earthquake (1755), the French occupation (1759), and the coronation of the Emperor (1764).

In 1765 came the first decisive change. Wolfgang

was destined, as a matter of course, for his father's profession of law, and in October of that year he was entered as a student of "Jura" at the University of Leipzig. Leipzig was famous for the prodigious learning of its professors; it was also a centre of German "elegance," (hence nicknamed "Little Paris,") and the seat of the "German Boileau" and the "German La Fontaine"—Gottsched and Gellert. The reputation of both was now, however, on the wane. That of Gottsched, in particular, had been irretrievably damaged by the first fiery assault of Lessing in the *Litteraturbriefe*, soon to be enforced in the *Laokoon* (1766) and the Hamburg *Dramaturgie* (1767-9), upon the "classic" literary ideals of the France of Louis XIV and her German imitators. The great founder of the intellectual independence of Germany had impressed the young student but not yet won him. He draws amusing pictures of the awe and ceremony which still encompassed the two masters of a passing mode; but he was more their disciple than he knew, and his first attempts in drama, *Die Laune des Verliebten* and *Die Mitschuldigen* are worthy of a school which assimilated only the second-rate elements in the great and noble art of Molière. But art was already with him only an expression, for better or worse, of his own eager and passionate experience; the shadowy figures of these pieces symbolised a romance of his own which for two years bit deeply into heart and brain—his love for Katharina Schönkopf, the daughter of a Leipzig hotel-keeper. Drama itself was too indirect a form of expression to suffice, and his impetuous lyric nature poured itself forth in letters to intimate friends, and above all in songs, full of fire and music under their thin disguise of rococo phrase. The boy of twenty was already the first lyric poet of Germany.

A dangerous crisis, which brought him near to death

and powerfully stirred the mystic and pietist strain in his nature, was followed, after some dubious and difficult months at home, by the momentous year at Strassburg (1770-1). The completion of his legal studies was still his ostensible aim, but the real worth of this sojourn for him lay in three vital experiences—the discovery of the glory of Gothic architecture in the Strassburg Minster, the friendship of Herder, and the love of Friederike Brion. Johann Gottfried Herder, only five years Wolfgang's senior, had already entered upon his decisive life's work. No creative poet like Goethe, no incisive and regulative critic like Lessing, he had a divining insight, never surpassed, into the elemental creative forces of poetry, wherever they existed. He opened Goethe's eyes to the power of simple, passionate speech in the ballad, and sent him collecting ballads on his own account from the lips of Alsatian peasant-women. But he also taught him to read Homer and Shakespeare with new eyes, to see in them not merely beautiful or sublime creations, but revelations of nature and of life. This new way of looking at poetry also led him to discover new meanings in the other arts.

The Minster of Strassburg had thrilled him with ecstasy from the first; but he now hailed in it, and in the Gothic building-craft of which it was so splendid an example, the characteristic and consummate expression of the soul of the German people. Gothic and Shakespeare, in his eyes, stood together, objects of the same glowing homage, and fundamentally akin.

In the tragic romance of *Sesenheim* Herder had also an indirect share. It was he who introduced to Goethe *The Vicar of Wakefield*, published some six years before. The future author of *Hermann und Dorothea* listened with delight to this first genuine modern idyll, which he still, in old age, considered one of the best novels in the

world. And some of its enchantment clearly fell upon the country parsonage of Sesenheim. Poetry and life lay, we know, very near in Goethe; but if Goldsmith perhaps set the idyll in motion, it soon grew out of his influence and beyond his reach. His Olivia cannot match in gracious charm this simple German maid, as she gleams for us across the old poet's wistful reminiscences, and in the young poet's magical songs. He loved her with passion, and she gave her whole heart to him. His final rupture of their virtual betrothal is the best-known event in Goethe's life, and the principal item in the popular judgment of his character. It was a grievous error to accept the gift of the girl's heart when he was not sure of his own, but to condemn him unconditionally for ending the engagement is to cut the knot of an ethical problem of extreme complexity. The hero of the *Neue Melusine* found that, to marry the beautiful pygmy-maid, he had to enter the pygmy world himself. The legend, which he had told in the early days of the Sesenheim idyll, perhaps foreshadowed its end. Yet it does scant justice either to Friederike or to Goethe himself. Certainly his act was no cold desertion, but a struggling surrender, made with bitter self-reproach, and followed by months of stormy unrest.

In August 1771, having completed his legal course, Goethe returned to Frankfurt and began a somewhat nominal practice at the bar. His real life during the next four years was a gleaming tissue of friendship, love, and poetry. Its principal events were the episode of his four-months' residence, as assessor to the Reichskammergericht at Wetzlar, May to August, 1772, and his acquaintance with Lotte Buff. No man was ever more lavishly endowed with the gifts of mind and person which captivate society and win the warm affection of men and the idolatrous devotion of women;

feelings to which his own inflammable temperament responded with dangerous alacrity and vehemence. That the passion for Friederike was so soon followed by the passion for Lotte Buff, and this by his engagement to Lili Schönemann (1775), not to speak of intervening episodes, ought less to be emphasised than that these relations were, on the whole, so blameless. If literary enthusiasms quickened his sensibility to love, his poetic energy acted as a safeguard and relief. Homer and Ossian—"poets of Nature and simplicity"—counted for something in the ecstasy with which he watched Lotte cutting bread-and-butter for her small brothers and sisters; but the issue of the Wetzlar idyll was merely his return home, heart-whole, to write, some months later, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (published 1774), his first and most famous romance.

But his most potent poetry of these years was not chiefly concerned with love. He was in the full spring-tide of his genius; the shaping spirit of imagination worked with joyous freedom and ease, and the figures it bodied forth were those of other shaping spirits—Titanic makers and builders, rebels, discoverers; Prometheus making men in his own image and despite the gods; Dr. Faustus, turning from the vanity of science and art to discover the truth even with the devil's aid; Mahomet, regenerating religion by his sublime vision of God; the "Wandering Jew," riddling the Christian legend with his drastic wit; Götz von Berlichingen, the iron-handed knight, shaping his own rude order in an anarchic age. If Goethe mirrored himself in *Werther*, so he did in *Prometheus* and in *Faust*; and these latter images, if less faithful to outward facts, reveal more distinctly the mind and character of the man. Werther wept and shot himself, but the poet mastered his passion and went back to live and to work.



Of the poetic schemes thus prodigally thrown off, only the first and the last were ever completed. But *Götz* made him the most famous German poet of the day, and with *Werther* Germany, after two centuries, once more began to count in European literature. His sudden and splendid fame led, moreover, to an event which was to be the decisive turning-point of his life, and without which the course of the literature both of Germany and of Europe itself in the nineteenth century would have been other than they were. Karl August, a boy of eighteen, who had recently succeeded to the throne of Saxe-Weimar, invited him to visit his court. Goethe, in November 1775, accepted the invitation. An official appointment followed. Weimar thenceforth became his home. It also, for more than half a century, became the capital of German letters.

The young grand-duke, a simple, vigorous, warm, and sterling nature, heartily admired his brilliant friend; and Goethe, in the heyday of manhood, and but eight years his senior, was mentor and comrade in one. With what high sense of duty, deep self-distrust, tender regard for his pupil-sovereign, and alternating confidence and dejection Goethe carried out his task is disclosed, above all, in the wonderful lines written, after eight years, at Ilmenau. "Who knows himself and what he can achieve?" he asked; and this poem, like the nearly contemporary *Harzreise*, lets us see how much Goethe himself had grown in the interval. The vehement passions of his youth are not quenched—death only was to do that—but they are tempered and spiritualised by a larger humanity. He feels the mystery of personality, and watches the lives of other men with a characteristic union of scientific interest, imaginative insight, and human sympathy. He brought the same qualities to the study of society, and the little

Weimar duchy grew in well-being through the presence of the administrator, as it did in celebrity by the presence of the poet. And his interest did not stop at man; he became an eager student of the physical sciences, classified minerals, experimented with plants, and contemplated them all in the light of his intuition of a pervading unity, which, with Spinoza, he called Nature or God.

Of all this the germs are traceable in Goethe's earlier thinking. But, on the whole, these ten years following the call to Weimar stand in amazing contrast with the ten years which preceded it. Harmonious and responsibly ordered activity has taken the place of the surging tumult of youth; the man who beyond all contemporaries had felt life intensely is becoming one who, even more signally beyond them, saw life whole. That the change was so rapid and so far-reaching he owed to the most intimate personal relationship he ever knew. Charlotte von Stein, the wife of a court official, and a few years older than himself, was a woman of fine gifts and noble character. Fascinated in spite of herself by the redoubtable breaker of hearts, she was strong enough to maintain for nearly fourteen years an intimacy, passionate on both sides, on the footing of a spiritual friendship. Of this friendship enduring monuments remain in his letters (hers she unfortunately destroyed after their rupture), some exquisite lyrics, and especially in the two dramas which centre in the ideal womanhood of Iphigenie and Leonore. It was not for nothing that he hailed Shakespeare and "Lotte" together as the two who had made him what he was.

These poems, however, together with almost everything else that he was yet to do, owed their final form to the event which, next to his call to Weimar, set the deepest stamp upon his mind and character—his journey

to Italy (1786-8). It was ostensibly a holiday tour granted to the busy administrator and court official; for Goethe himself it was a flight (his "Hegira," it has often been called) from the provincial homeliness of Weimar—perhaps, also, from the pang of unsatisfied love—to the radiance, the antique glories, and the freedom of Italy. In Italy what he most deeply needed in art, even in life, seemed to have been already won, and he answered to its spell with a passion which still vibrates for us in Mignon's famous song, *Kennst du das Land?* For months before he had not dared to open a Latin classic.

In September 1786 Goethe secretly and without a warning, even to Frau von Stein, set forth. He travelled rapidly across the Alps, then, with many pauses and detours, through Northern Italy, freely gratifying his versatile curiosity and his, to us, sometimes paradoxical tastes. Gothic and Byzantine Venice attracted him less than Palladian Vicenza. At Assisi he turned scornfully away from the splendid churches of St. Francis to the little antique temple of Minerva. The great moments of his journey were the two sojourns, lasting together more than a year, at Rome, and the intervening visit to Naples and Sicily. In the scenery and people of the Mediterranean island he found the very key to the Odyssey. Odysseus and Nausicaa took shape before him on the Taormina shore, and he planned a drama, never completed, on the immortal story. At Rome he set himself to master, face to face with the antique statues, the secrets of the antique ideal of beauty, finding in the sculptured human form "the *non plus ultra* of human knowledge and achievement." The emancipated life of the artist circles at Rome he shared, meantime, without reserve. At length, in April 1788, he tore himself away, and hurried with backward gaze once more across the Alps.

The immediate sequel of the journey corresponded little to the ardent hopes with which he had entered on it, or to the rapturous fulfilment of them which it had brought. The six years between his return, in June 1788, and the beginning of his friendship with Schiller in 1794, were among the most barren of his mature life. Italy had permanently loosened his German ties, and for the time blunted some of his German instincts. He looked with distaste upon the "formless" features of his northern land; he resented its obtrusive moralities. The relations into which he entered, shortly after his return, with Christiane Vulpius, though regarded by him as a virtual marriage, completed his estrangement from Weimar society, and cost him the friendship, already shaken by his "flight," of Charlotte von Stein. The *Roman Elegies*, set beside *Tasso*, measure the difference between the love he forfeited and the love he won. Yet the pagan splendour of these erotics marks perhaps his highest reach in poetry in these years. His keenest interest was turned to science, to the problems of Nature, which for him were but another aspect of the problems of Art. As he had pursued the ideal type of beauty in the human form, so he was now fascinated by the conception of an original plant (*Urpflanze*) from which all the botanical species should be derived; and it was in these years that he actually made the two discoveries which give him a place in the history of biology—the morphological continuity of the flower and the leaf, and that of the brain and the spinal cord. The former doctrine he embodied, later on, in *The Metamorphosis of Plants*; a didactic poem, if we will, but one in which poetry is truly, in Wordsworth's phrase, "the impassioned expression" of science. And science, even more than poetry, withdrew his interest from the colossal remaking of a nation which was in progress

during these very years beyond the Rhine. That "dawn" in which Wordsworth felt it bliss to be alive, and which Schiller hailed with rapture, roused in the state minister of Weimar only disdain; and he conveyed this opinion in dramatic satires (the *Grosskophta*, the *Bürgergeneral*, *Die Aufgeregten*), which count (for such contempt revenges itself) among the weakest of his original works. More serious attempts to handle it proved abortive. The fragmentary *Mädchen von Oberkirch* is purely domestic, and *Die Natürliche Tochter* breaks off before a note of revolution has been heard. He succeeded better in his verse paraphrase of the mediæval Beast-epic, *Reinecke Fuchs*, a vivid social satire, capable of piquant modern application; yet such work as this implied a grave estrangement of the author of a *Prometheus*, of a *Faust* (issued as a "Fragment" in 1790), from his proper tasks.

From this estrangement he was withdrawn, above all, by the stimulating friendship of the great fellow-poet whose name in the hearts of the German people is for ever linked with his. Friedrich Schiller, ten years his junior, had been far less favoured by outward fortune than he. Brought up in the ducal military school of Stuttgart, he had marked his escape from its restraints by a trumpet-blast "against tyrants" in general, his epoch-making first drama, *Die Räuber* (1781). The younger generation, which had been captivated by *Götz* eight years before, found the turgid sublimity of *The Robbers* even more to its mind. Goethe, however, read with aversion this mighty caricature of the storm and stress he had now himself put by; and its author's ensuing dramas—*Fiesco*, *Kabale und Liebe*, even *Don Carlos*—though reflecting in increasing degree the tempering influence of Lessing, and his own, did little to reconcile him. Outside the drama, however, he was ready to recognise Schiller's merits even beyond their

desert, and procured his appointment, in 1788, as professor of History at Jena. This had the result of fixing Schiller in his neighbourhood, but six years were still to pass before they made any close approach. In 1794 Schiller invited Goethe's participation in his new monthly literary review, *Die Horen*, and Goethe's ready assent gave occasion to Schiller's remarkable letter of August 23, in which the history of Goethe's mind was laid open before him, with equal penetration, reverence, and sympathy, by the younger poet from whose intimacy he had so sensitively held aloof. Schiller wrote as a disciple, Goethe recognised in him an interpreter and an ally; and their alliance ripened fast into a close and extraordinarily fruitful friendship. Like the other poet-pair who met at Nether Stowey three years later, they drew together from widely severed points of the intellectual horizon. Schiller's strength lay in ideal conceptions, Goethe's in an exquisitely plastic perception of the real world. Schiller had first won fame by an inspired assault upon the actual social conditions which Goethe in the main joyously accepted. But under the diversity of gift and temperament there worked a common leaven in the two minds. Both sought, in art, to reconcile truth of presentation with the ideal needs of man. While they still stood aloof, Schiller had been persistently striving to make his ideal figures more indefeasibly concrete; and Goethe, on his part, face to face with the masterpieces of Attic sculpture, had read the secret of giving real forms ideal significance. Visionary romanticism was at bottom as foreign to the author of *Wilhelm Tell* as photographic naturalism to the author of *Tasso*. Their first approach, accordingly, followed by a fortnight (September 14 to 28) of close discussion in Goethe's house, found them in all essentials at one. The subject-matter

of poetry had to be neither abstract nor literal, neither conventional nor matter-of-fact, but, in Goethe's phrase, "typical"—that is, drawn from reality at its points of maximal expressiveness. Attic art and poetry, seen, it is true, through a veil of imperfect knowledge, seemed to both the supreme embodiment of what they sought. Their differences of mental build were naturally not effaced; patriotic fervour and cosmopolitan calm became even more distinct by contrast now that they stood leagued together; but such differences only added to the value of a comradeship which soon became indispensable to both. And Goethe, who perhaps felt the need of it least deeply, owed to it the most.

For it was Schiller, the narrower but intenser nature, who successfully combated the self-dispersion incident to his friend's immense versatility, and brought him back to his proper task of poetry, partly by the stimulus of his encouragement, partly by his infectious creative energy, but also by his brilliant illumination of critical problems. His æsthetic essays (especially the two famous ones, *On the Æsthetic Education of Mankind* and *On the Naïve and the Sentimental*) contributed to give Goethe a deeper grasp of the meaning of his own art; and the letters in which, especially during 1794-7, they carried on these inquiries belong, like the nearly contemporary discussions of Wordsworth and Coleridge at Nether Stowey, to the enduring documents of modern Poetic.

But the direct stimulus to poetic creation was even more important. The same three years, the first of their comradeship, were a harvest-season of Goethe's poetry, the last in which he was to gather abundantly and with ease from those wonderful acres which yielded their last ears only to his dying hand. The most important, if the least popular, of the works published during these years, *Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre* (pub-

lished 1797), was substantially complete, and its publication already arranged, when their closer acquaintance opened; but its successive books (from Book III onwards) were read by Schiller in manuscript, and have gained in intellectual lucidity and coherence from the criticisms in detail which accompanied his almost unbounded admiration for it as a whole.

A yet greater service was to come. It was Schiller's eager urgency which finally overcame his friend's nervous reluctance to resume work upon the gigantic "Fragment" of *Faust*, which, as already stated, had been before the world since 1790. The new scenes contained some of Goethe's grandest poetry. They also reinterpreted the tragic story in the spirit of his new Hellenic optimism; and the vast Second Part, which the re-interpretation involved, was now planned and in part written. Neo-Hellenic too, in form as well as temper, was most of the other original work of these years. The classical elegiacs and hexameters, which he had used with varying success in the "Roman" and "Venetian" Elegies, and in *Reinecke Fuchs* (1794), became for some years his favourite medium for non-lyric verse, and for the more gnomic kinds of lyric too. Epistles, elegies—especially the beautiful *Alexis und Dora* (1796) and *Der neue Pausias*—and epigrams in profusion flowed from his pen. Most of these pieces were strongly coloured with reminiscences of the paradise beyond the Alps. But twice at least he touched these antique modes with definite success to modern issues. In 1796 Schiller issued in his *Musenalmanach* the first batch of the satiric epigrams (*Xenien*), in which the two brother-poets, self-constituted censors, struck, in the name of good literature, at all the current representatives of dilettantism and pretence. And, in the very midst of the storm which the *Xenien* provoked,



Goethe sent forth his beautiful Homeric idyll of modern German life, *Hermann und Dorothea*, the only one of his longer poems which has the flawless unity of classic art, and owes none of its interest to the shifting outlook of a mind that never ceased to grow.

After the joint campaign of the *Xenien* came their friendly competition in the ballad (from 1797). Here, as in the satiric epigram, Schiller in some points surpassed his friend. His manner was less chiselled, but he had the accent of a minstrel singing to a listening throng; his ballads struck more surely home to the German heart. Yet Goethe's *Braut von Korinth* and *Der Gott und die Bajadere* (to speak only of the work of this later period) belong, with Bürger's *Lenore*, *The Ancient Mariner*, and *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, to the summits of the literary ballad.

But the memorable partnership drew towards its close, and the splendour of its later years belongs rather to the younger poet. Schiller's great trilogy, *Wallenstein*, was produced upon the Weimar stage in 1799, then his *Maria Stuart*, his *Jungfrau von Orleans*, his *Braut von Messina*, finally his *Wilhelm Tell*. He himself removed to Weimar at the end of 1799, and their correspondence was henceforth mainly confined to brief notes, failing us just when their intercourse entered upon its last and most intimate phase; for in May 1805, after a short illness, Schiller died. Goethe could have suffered no sharper blow. For ten years no one had stood so near him. His old master, Herder, long before his death in 1803, had stood aloof, embittered and estranged. A new generation had grown up about him, the generation to which he was to address the mournful reminiscent opening verses of the First Part of *Faust* :

“ Sie hören nicht die folgenden Gesänge,  
Die Seelen, denen ich die ersten sang ”;

and the rapturous homage which some of them, like Friedrich Schlegel, offered to the author, in particular, of *Wilhelm Meister*, could not prevent him from feeling this new generation strange. It was the infant nineteenth century in its young ebullience; and Goethe, pregnant as his thought was with much of the wisdom of that century, was yet the child of the eighteenth. The death of Schiller closed an epoch, but his life had been a deathless vindication of ideal truth, goodness, and beauty, and Goethe's noble requiem, the *Epilogue* to Schiller's *Glocke*, was at the same time a pæan of triumphant faith.

But upon the lofty humanities of Weimar the brute forces of the world were about to break in. On October 14, 1806, the battle of Jena shattered the power of Prussia, and put her ally, the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, and his little territory at the mercy of Napoleon and his victorious troops. The European fame of the author of *Werther* procured orders for his respectful treatment; but undisciplined soldiery entered his house, and Goethe owed his life to the resolute bearing of Christiane. Eight days later he married the devoted mistress whom he had always regarded as his wife. The humiliation of his country did not, as such, weigh heavily upon him. Not national greatness but a civilised humanity was his ideal, and his own debt to French culture—to Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot—was too deep to allow him to regard even the political domination of France as a menace to civilisation. The demonic force of Napoleon won his admiration, and a kindred quality in himself caught Napoleon's penetrating eye. "*Voilà un homme!*" the Emperor exclaimed, after their historic meeting two years later at Erfurt. At Weimar, meantime, things had resumed their normal course. In 1808 the completed First

Part of *Faust* at length appeared. It was received with a burst of applause, and the most distinguished minds were the most outspoken in their admiration. A Goethe cult began. Women, some of them intellectual and brilliant, like Rahel von Ense and (in a less degree) Bettina von Arnim, others of captivating grace and beauty, like Minna Herzlieb, offered him their dangerous homage. By the last-named the eternal youth in him was deeply stirred; he devoted to her some of the not very numerous fine sonnets that Germany possesses, and her image haunts his more memorable poetry in these and the ensuing years. The drama *Pandora* remained a splendid fragment. But in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (Elective Affinities) (1808) he achieved the most finished of his novels, and in 1810 appeared the first instalment of the wonderful memoir of his early life, which he called *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. Years had only matured the epic ease of his prose; they had hardly impaired the capacity of his verse, under strong emotional stimulus, for moments of superb power. Two such occasions were still to occur. Of his friendship with Marianne von Willemer, the young wife of an old Frankfurt friend, in 1814, the lyrics of the *West-östlicher Divan* remain an enduring memorial in a double sense, for some of the finest songs are hers. Nine years later, a passion, pathetically intense, for a young girl, Ulrike von Levetzow, whom he met with her mother at Marienbad, found utterance in the great *Marienbader Elegie*, with which he sealed his renunciation. To the last his genius kindled at the throb of his heart. But most of the work of his old age merely gave accomplished expression to ideas which had occupied his intellect. It was thus, on the whole, with the two chief literary tasks which remained—the completion of *Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre* (pub-

lished 1821), and of the Second Part of *Faust*, resumed in 1824, and completed, a few months before his death, in 1831.

The symbolic adventures of the later Wilhelm and the later Faust mirror the phases of the later Goethe's faith, his ideals, and his interests. During the long morning hours, day by day, these last works were slowly and laboriously built up. The rest of the day he devoted to an amazing variety of other pursuits, and to intercourse with a host of friends. For every new phenomenon in art, in science, he had an open and eager ear, and a little unofficial staff of young devotees supplemented his information with digests and reports. Chief beyond comparison of these was, during the last eight years of his life, J. P. Eckermann, the German Boswell to whom we owe the admirable *Conversations with Goethe*.

Pilgrims, native and foreign, came in increasing numbers. They were not always well received, and Goethe's lofty cosmopolitanism sometimes provoked the reproach of being alive to the merit of every nationality but his own. The great dramatist Kleist he had to the last ignored. The later developments of German Romanticism repelled him. The brilliance of Heine and of Platen he recognised—across a gulf. In literary vitality he put contemporary France at the head of all other nations; her *romantiques*, unlike the German, he read with keen interest, as well as the early essays of Sainte-Beuve in the *Paris Globe*. Manzoni and Walter Scott now probably stood, for him, since the death of Byron, at the head of European letters, and he exchanged fraternal greetings with both. Alike in France and England groups of younger writers sent him tributes of their regard. In England, Carlyle, the translator of *Wilhelm Meister*, brought to the old poet an exalted

homage which he paid to no other contemporary, and expounded his teaching in some of the most penetrating critical essays in our language. Goethe, on his part, divined his disciple's moral genius, poles asunder as it was from his own, and foretold the future of the author of *Sartor* at a time when he was still a riddle or a bug-bear to his own countrymen. The gift of a seal, inscribed with the Goethean motto, "*Ohne Hast, aber ohne Rast*," from Carlyle and seventeen other English friends, greeted the poet's eighty-second birthday (August 28, 1831). It was to be the last. He passed the winter in unbroken health, reading and conversing with his usual alertness and zest. His last verses were written on March 7th, his last letter on the 17th. On the 22nd, shortly before noon, he quietly passed away in his arm-chair. A few days later his body was borne with royal honours to the mausoleum by the Ilm, and laid to rest beside the remains of Karl August, his sovereign, and of Schiller, with whom he shares the greater sovereignty of modern German poetry.

## CHAPTER II

### LYRIC AND NARRATIVE VERSE

GOETHE is, by general consent, one of the great lyric poets of the world; he is also one of those whose lyric poetry most successfully evades both translation and critical analysis. He was a consummate master of verse, and used it for almost every variety of the recognised kinds of poetry. Large tracts of it, full of brilliant workmanship as they are, have passed into the limbo from which style itself cannot redeem second-rate or ephemeral

substance. What endures, and must endure, is at first sight almost devoid of the marks of art. The kind of poetry which wafts us, on a phrase or a simile, into dream-worlds of imagination is rare indeed. Beside the superb figured speech of Keats or the iridescent glow of Heine the lyric language of Goethe is of almost naked simplicity. The scenes and subjects, like the speech, do not take us far from the common earth. There are few strange incidents, few paradoxical characters and situations, few that approach either the heights or the depths of humanity; little of heroic daring or endurance, of the trumpet-notes of prophecy, of tragic cruelty or harrowing pathos. His lyric motives and his lyric speech, like those of German lyric poets at large, are founded upon the folksong, that incomparable heritage of the German people. There he and they had felt the spell of simple passions simply told, of rude, unstudied, but poignant verse. Goethe was by far the greatest artist who had yet used the German tongue; but he had also of all her poets the most *nature*, a naïve directness and spontaneity of feeling, with an exquisite instinct for the transparently expressive word. To this rare union of seemingly opposite gifts Goethe's lyrics owe their supreme distinction. His love poetry springs fresh from his own experience of love, and reflects all its changing moods and notes; from the glowing eroticism of the Leipzig student, the naïve rapture of Friederike's lover, the self-mocking passion of Lili's, the tender ideality of Frau von Stein's, the assured serenity of Christiane's, to the pagan splendour of the *Roman Elegies*, the elegiac wistfulness of the *Divan*, the anguished resignation of the *Trilogie der Leidenschaft*. No one knew better the Protean transformations of the lover's mood; and the winged verses, "*Herz, mein Herz,*" and *Wonne der Liebe*, express as finally the bliss which

is half ecstasy and half despair as Catullus's "*Odi et amo*" expresses the torment wrought by the concurrence of love and hate.

But a charm even more exquisite, and not less enduring, lies upon the lyrics inspired by the two women who themselves retain the most enduring hold upon us—Friederike and Charlotte. A lover's eager ride through the gloaming to his mistress's home is a common enough motive; but who has more wonderfully painted the transfiguring spell which such a mood flings over all the inanimate earth? He leaps to horse, Evening already cradles the world, and Night hangs from the mountains; the oak, a towering giant, stands there in its robe of mist, and darkness, with a hundred swarthy eyes, glares from the copse. The moon from its cloudy heights looks sadly through the fragrant haze; the wind's light plumes astir rustle mysteriously at his ear; Night brings a thousand monsters. But his heart is fresh and glad:

"In meinen Adern welches Feuer!  
In meinem Herzen welche Gluth!"

And even the pang of parting, for her very real, is for him overwhelmed in the glory of his young love:

"I turned away, you stood with downcast gaze, and looked with wet eyes after me: and yet, what bliss it is to be loved! And, ye gods, what bliss to love!"

In the Charlotte lyrics this feverish ecstasy is replaced by a clear, sustained soul-light of passion, a rarer and even more beautiful thing, in literature as in life.

"The One, Lida, whom thou canst love,  
Thou claimest wholly for thine own, and rightly.  
And he, too, is wholly thine.

For, since I have been absent from thee,  
 To me the noisy movement  
 Of life at its swiftest  
 Seems but a floating mist thro' which for ever  
 As in the clouds I discern thy form ;  
 It shines for me a trusty beacon,  
 As thro' the quivering rays of the Aurora  
 Glimmer eternal stars."

Love was Goethe's most potent lyric inspiration. And the love of Charlotte, if not the most potent, was the most enduring, and that which most enriched all the springs of his poetry. He fitly placed at the forefront of his collected poems the noble "Dedication," in which the Muse who bestows on him the magic veil of poetry "from the hand of Truth" originally wore her likeness and bore her name.

But the loveliness of the earth touched him deeply for itself, and he saw it with the eye at once of naturalist and poet. The *Metamorphose der Pflanzen* is a great evolutionary hymn. All the intoxication of the wakening of spring glows and quivers through the *Mailed*; and in the wonderful "Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh" the solemn coming on of night among the mountains, the sleeping birds, the hastening wanderer, are brought before us in four brief phrases with haunting power, like that of some utterly simple melody of Beethoven on three or four notes. A more complex mood is conveyed in the not less wonderful stanzas *An den Mond*—a lonely meditation "between joy and pain," of remembered friendship and vanished faith, poised on a language of half-lights and half-tones, like those of the glimmering landscape and the murmuring river. Some of the greatest of the songs are "dramatic lyrics" in Browning's sense—the anguished prayer of Gretchen ("O neige, Du gnadenreiche"), Mignon's poignant cry from un-



fathomable depths, the Harp-player's sternly pitiful "Wer nie sein Brod mit Thränen ass," which consoled the great queen of Prussia in the misery of her flight into exile after Jena.

Goethe's *Ballads* fall short in fiery rush and swing of Schiller's, with which they naturally provoke comparison; but his best, such as *Erlkönig* and the *König von Thule*, have an intense brevity and a plastic power beside which Schiller's eloquence looks rhetorical and his composition loose.

A more individual group of poems is the series of meditative or critical pieces. The reader to whom Goethe has been merely a "self-centred egoist" discovers in *Ilmenau* and *Harzreise im Winter* with what delicate and tender thoughtfulness he could brood over the problem of a young man's unfolding life, and with what searching criticism, too, he could survey the glorious extravagances of his own past. "I brought pure fire from the altar, but what I kindled was not pure flame." In the magnificent stanzas of the *Epilog zu Schiller's Glocke* he commemorates with not less penetrating power the life of his great friend and comrade, "whose spirit strode onward to the eternity of the True and Good and Fair, and behind him, an empty phantom, lay the commonness to which all we succumb." In several pieces of this group Goethe used mythic symbols with rare delicacy and beauty to convey his own thoughts about God and the World. Some of them are written in the brief, unrhymed stanza which Arnold imitated in *Heine's Grave* and elsewhere. Such are *Mahomet's Song*, the *Song of the Spirits over the Waters*, *Prometheus*, and the later *Grenzen der Menschheit*. In the last-named poem the two unreconciled aspects of Goethe's thought, which centred in Man and in Nature, found superb expression side by side. In the first

stanzas he utterly throws over the arrogant claims for Man put forth in the *Prometheus*. Man is now no more the Titan, shaping and making like the gods and in their despite, but the helpless subject and victim of passionless Nature, of brazen, inexorable, eternal laws. But the next stanza abruptly releases him from these bonds.

“Man alone  
 Can achieve the impossible.  
 He distinguishes,  
 Chooses and judges,  
 He can make  
 The moment endure.  
 He alone is able  
 To crown the well-doer,  
 Punish the evil,  
 To heal and to save ;  
 All things that stray and wander,  
 To bind for his good.”

Even in his impassioned lyric, Goethe's thought crystallises readily in gnomic sentences ; and a whole section of his poetry consists of such sayings in detached, epigrammatic form. In the *Xenien* they were satiric, winged words of literary scorn rather than of personal animosity, and pointed rather than barbed. More enduring and more characteristic than the satire are the poetic apophthegms, finally arranged in the collection called the *Four Seasons*.

Much of the pith of Goethe's large and benign wisdom may be found in couplets like these :

“Ever strive to be a whole, and if thou canst not become a whole thyself, to the service of a whole give thyself up.” (45.)

“Who is the happiest man? He who can feel the merit of others and rejoice in others' enjoyment as in his own.” (50.)

“That which captivates youth, holds manhood, and solaces age, may this, dear child, be thy fortunate lot.” (47.)

“What is Holy? That which binds many souls together, were it lightly as the garland is bound by the thread.” (76.)

“What is the Holiest? That which, now and always, as it is deeper felt, brings into deeper accord.” (77.)

With some two or three others, among the moderns, Goethe stands in the highest rank of lyric poets. How was it with the longer, narrative or “epic” poem? The nineteenth century, so ambitious and so many-sided, has left in this region no supreme work; and few which their authors did not surpass elsewhere. Towards the close of his first Weimar period Goethe planned a poem on a vast scale, *Die Geheimnisse*, in which his inmost convictions were to be unfolded to the world; the twelve historic religions were to be represented each by a knight, the “hero”—Humanus—standing for and expounding that religion of *Humanität* which then best expressed Goethe’s own mind. A few stanzas, some of penetrating beauty, were alone written. After his return from Italy, the epic ambition revived, fostered not only by the encouragement of Schiller and the example of Voss, the translator of Homer and author of the “Homeric” idyll *Luise*, but, strange to say, by Wolff’s destruction (as Goethe thought) of the dogma of a personal Homer.

Of all the great poetry of the world, “Homer” alone was the object of Goethe’s unchanging admiration. The famous *Prolegomena* of Wolff, representing the Iliad and the Odyssey as the composite work of many singers, made their grandeur appear less unapproachable.

“For who would dare strive with gods? and who with the matchless one? But to be even the last of the Homeric tribe is a noble lot.”

And in *Herrmann und Dorothea* Goethe does not "strive with the gods." He does not attempt epic in the Homeric sense, as he was to do vainly, a little later, in the *Achilleis*. The story, like that of Voss's *Luise*, is an idyll—nay, an anecdote. But there are idyllic episodes in Homer; and the affinities of Goethe's poem are with scenes like the parting of Hector and Andromache; or, still more, with that in which Nausicaa brings help, touched with shy love, to the homeless stranger—a scene which, as we have seen, he had dreamed, in Sicily, of turning into drama.

Goethe has contrived to tell with a large measure of the same lucidity, nobility, and precision his story of a German innkeeper's son who goes out to relieve a band of fugitives and returns with a bride. And in the background of the idyll rages a truly epic turmoil of contending nations. The canvass is narrow, but there are far horizons; the earth trembles with the tramp of armies which remain invisible. What comes into the picture is only the train of German peasant and burgher folk flying before the invaders to the securer homelands beyond the Rhine. The sufferings incident to such a flight are lightly touched, for harrowing misery was repugnant to Goethe's instincts and foreign to his art. The fugitives, though homeless, are not poor; the oxen which draw their household goods are the mightiest of the land beyond Rhine. Even the overturning of the waggon is not tragic; Goethe takes care that the heavy chests shall fall clear of the people. Between them and the folks of the little town, as between Greeks and Trojans, there is no contrast of class or of race, only the contrast between a community torn from its native soil and one securely planted there; but this contrast is touched with that delicate feeling for what may be called the *biology*

of towns which was as marked in Goethe as his indifference to their *history*. The psychology and economics of a little German Rhineland town, living part by trade and part by farming, with its market-place and *Brunnen*, its *Apotheke*, its substantial old-established hostelry, and its one or two more pretentious houses, newly painted in green and white; all this everyday matter had never been harmoniously wrought into a woof of noble poetry before. At the inn-door the host and his wife sit chatting with the parson and the apothecary. In the portraits of Herrmann's father and mother, Goethe clearly remembered his own; that of the "kluge verständige Hausfrau," especially, is touched with the tender intimacy which had always bound "Frau Aja" and her son. Herrmann himself, however, has less of Goethe than any other of his heroes; he is typical German manhood, as it then was, in the making; capable, sound, and true to the core, but diffident and unformed; slow to resolve, but strong when his mind is set. Dorothea is not less German, but her mind is quicker and clearer; her rich nature has been ripened by suffering and danger; she has the heroism of primitive Teutonic womanhood, but she shows it in protecting a helpless young mother and saving young girls from outrage. Sure of herself, she is utterly free from timidity or false pride. Herrmann's equal or superior in station, she hesitates neither to beg his help for her companion, nor to accept his proposal to go as hired servant into his parents' house. When she imagines herself made game of, her anger flames up and she rushes out into the night and storm, to become once more a homeless fugitive. A few moments later, all is explained, the daughter of revolution has taken the hand of the son of old-world custom, and these two strong German souls will possess each

other the more surely because all other bonds are endangered :

“So much the firmer be, in the universal upheaval,  
Dorothea, our bond! . . .

For in a wavering time the man who is wavering-minded  
Worsens the ill and spreads it in wider and wider circle ;  
He that stands firm, the world is his, to make it and mould it ;  
Thou art mine, and that which is mine more mine than ever.”

The characters of *Herrmann und Dorothea* are typical, but they are not abstract. The distinction is vital for the understanding of Goethe's art in the post-Italian period. To say (as is sometimes said) that they express his “repugnance to reality,” and are “generalised” like the characters of Racine and Corneille, is to overlook this distinction. A *generalised* character is one denuded of all but generic traits, and therefore detached from reality, where individuals alone exist. A *typical* character is one completely individual, and therefore real, but where the single traits, though not common to the whole class, are all expressive of it. This is the difference between the persons of Racine and those of Homer, and it is Homer whom Goethe has in view and whose art he imitates. Hence the profusion of vivid, precise and graphic detail, chosen with no regard to elegance or anything else but expressive force. It was not in the spirit of Racine (one recalls the *mouchoir* which scandalised the first French spectators of *Othello*) that the good hostess is made to remark how

“. . . jeglicher führt das Schnupftuch und wischt sich den Schweiss ab.”

where the hexameter—one of the most fearsome that “daring Germany” has sent us—actually snuffles and swishes to match the action. At times the naïveté of Homeric realism is out of keeping even with the simple ways of old Germany ; when the modest and bashful

lover expounds the charms of Dorothea's person to his parents, we seem to catch an echo of a society in which women were exchangeable for so many oxen. At other times there are noble glimpses, truly Homeric yet wholly German too; as of Herrmann in the stall, where "the spirited horses stood at ease and swiftly devoured the cleanly oats and the dry hay cut in the best of the meadows." Other scenes again, not at all Homeric in character, have a serene and gracious charm not unlike his; such are the garden-talk of mother and son, and Herrmann's talk with Dorothea by the well.

*Herrmann und Dorothea* may be counted the most perfect of Goethe's larger works. It has the harmonious unity which he so constantly pursued and so rarely attained. But it falls short of being a great poem, and, with all its limpid beauty and rounded completeness, speaks home to the imagination less than the abandoned torsoes of his vehement and impassioned youth. Nor has the hexameter, neither Greek nor German, which he and Schiller used with so much satisfaction, finally won acceptance even in his own land. In our tongue it inspired the often beautiful, but on the whole dubious, tentatives of Longfellow, Kingsley, and Clough.

### CHAPTER III

#### PROSE FICTION

GOETHE'S novel and romance writing occupies but a single "mansion," and not the largest and most splendid in the immense "house" of his art. The five or six important examples were in the main isolated efforts, and their utter unlikeness of aim and method might suggest that they are the *tours de force* of a virtuoso, rather than points in the continuous development of a great artist

and poet. We have collections of short stories with connecting narrative, like the *Tales of German Emigrants* and *Die Guten Weiber*; autobiographical romances in letters, like *Werther*; or, if we look to theme, tales of passion, like *Werther* again; of culture and development, like *Wilhelm Meister*; of experimental natural history, like the *Wahlverwandtschaften*. Little need be said of the first two, but the last three enshrine vital elements of Goethe's life and mind. They also mark, in different degrees, both heights of achievement and points of departure in the history of the European novel.

### I. "DIE LEIDEN DES JUNGEN WERTHERS"

*Götz von Berlichingen* (1773) discovered Goethe to Germany; *Werther*, a year later, discovered him—nay, discovered German literature itself—to Europe. The book was in reality wonderfully fresh, one of the truly spontaneous things in an age of enlightened understanding, an "original" thing in a generation that had begun to canonise *Ursprünglichkeit*. Precedents it doubtless had, both in substance and form. The epistolary mode of telling a story had been started by Richardson in *Pamela* (1740), and followed by Rousseau in the *Nouvelle Héloïse* (1762); and Rousseau, in the same epoch-making book, had virtually created the novel of passionate and romantic love.

Without the *New Héloïse*, *Werther* would probably never have been written. Yet Goethe owed to it only stimulus and suggestion; his book is in the fullest sense his own. Rousseau, in his romance as elsewhere, had written as a social reformer bent upon confronting the illicit passion and the soulless vice of Paris with an appealing picture of pure and affectionate family life. The ardour of Rousseau's temperament interfered with the consistent execution of his design, and what cap-



tured and entranced the public was not the picture of the ideal married life of Mme. de Wolmar, but the glowing love-story of Julie and Saint-Preux. And here lay, in truth, the vital substance of the book. These scenes were steeped in the writer's impassioned experience; they revealed to the eighteenth century the love, as remote from profligacy as from platonism, which takes possession of all the powers of soul and sense, and transfigures all the attendant circumstance of place and time. And the descriptions of the scenery of Clarens and Meillerie, as seen through the enchanted eyes of Rousseau's lovers, wakened the whole of cultivated Europe to the mountain glory which only a sensitive spirit like Gray, here and there, had known before.

All this was in the air when Goethe, twelve years later, wrote his romance. To us, after the lapse of a century and a quarter, it seems the more vital book of the two. Preaching no gospel, holding up no ideal, steeped through and through in the experience of a young, fresh, and poetic nature, it seems a very branch of the green tree of life, untouched by the "grey" of theory. Goethe's own attachment to Lotte Buff is more closely reflected in it than Rousseau's to Mme. d'Houdetot in the *Heloïse*; and the story is both simpler and clearer, moving by inevitable steps to a catastrophe which conveys no moral. Compared with the crowded canvas of Richardson's *Clarissa*, which Rousseau had in view, the *Heloïse* is a story of few characters. But the little drama of *Werther* has only three essential persons—Lotte, Albert her betrothed, and Werther himself,—and the unity of effect is enhanced by the fact that they are all seen through the medium of a single mind, that of Werther himself, in whose letters alone—some brief intervals of narrative apart—the story is told.

The situation bore some resemblance to that of the

central portion of the *Heloïse*. Like Saint-Preux, Werther loves one who belongs definitely to another; but Julie, in rejecting him, is resigning her old lover, whom she still passionately loves, for the husband whom she dutifully accepts; Lotte is from the first engaged to Albert, and never compromises herself in the least degree with the fascinating secretary, whose charm she yet deeply feels. It is in the character of the two heroines that the two novels most decisively stand apart. Julie passes through a whole gamut of phases, from the precociously passionate child of eighteen, who falls in love with her young tutor at first sight, to the matron who dies in the odour of edification. Lotte is a simple, true-hearted German girl, whom the German people instantly welcomed as their own, as they welcomed her more poetised sister, Dorothea, in later days, and as the Scottish people, still later, welcomed Jeanie Deans. It matters little whether some memories of a later Frankfurt friend, Maxe Brentano, mingle or not with those of Charlotte Buff; Lotte is transparently the same from the first scene, where Werther with transport sees her cutting bread for her small brothers and sisters, to that in which she tears herself from his embrace and dismisses him for ever.

Werther, on the other hand, has obvious affinities with Saint-Preux, though it is certainly wrong to treat them, as some excellent critics have done, as *Doppelgänger*, who would have stared at each other with horror had they ever met. They would have embraced as brothers; but the one had too much of Rousseau, and the other too much of Goethe, for their profiles to coincide. Saint-Preux, Julie's lover, is also the "*philosophe*," denouncing to her the corruptions of Paris, the decadence of the arts, the boldness of the women. Rousseau's pessimism may be heard as a ground tone

through his most rapturous eloquence. Werther is not a philosopher, but a poet. Far from lacking ideas, he teems with them, but they spring directly from his fresh and eager contact with life. His passion, seemingly hopeless, only quickens the vivacity of his senses and imagination; his letters are full of vignettes, painted with a brilliance which Goethe never afterwards surpassed, yet with an air of colloquial rapidity and ease strikingly unlike the splendid rhetoric over which Saint-Preux, like all the other persons in the *Heloïse*, freely disposes. These vignettes have an enduring charm, which is not affected by our distaste for the "sentimentality" of the main theme. The many pictures of children; the young farmer in love with his employer; the pastor's wife, absorbed in the study of the Christian canon, who cuts down the shady nut-trees; the lunatic gathering flowers, and many more. Far more than Saint-Preux, Werther marks the coming of the poet-hero into literature. For Tom Jones or Roderick Random, even for Clarissa, the poet, the artist, hardly exists. The eloquence which is so evenly diffused among the persons of the *Heloïse* is not felt as a special trait of any. But Werther's speech, though the medium through which the whole story is presented, does not communicate its glamour to the other persons. Lotte and Albert are known to us only through Werther's letters, but their unadorned everyday talk stands as clearly apart from the brilliant eager prose in which it is inlaid as their quiet security of character from his mercurial unrest.

Werther's weakness is, indeed, but the reverse side of his strength. He became for his time the classical expression of the sentimentality of which Sterne set the fashion; fashionable Europe wept with him over the "sorrows" at which we smile. But his morbid emo-

tionalism was incidental to a general expansion of emotional power, an enlargement of the sources and an enrichment of the contents of feeling which was to have the chief share in the poetic renaissance of the next generation. Werther's passion for Lotte, however unmanly in its circumstances and in its issue, yet signifies an emancipation of the heart which was the deepest need of the age and the first condition of its spiritual health. His passion for Nature was a no less vital discovery, and one that has not suffered a like taint from time. Rousseau opened the eyes of his generation to the lake and mountain glory of Lemman, and Goethe learned from him to see the magic of the tender beauty of German valleys and uplands, and to render it in a prose less sonorous but more delicately articulated than his own. To the open heart of Werther, as later of Faust, Nature discloses itself as a boundless power, inexhaustibly rich in the springs of life and of art; and he derides, again like Faust, like Wordsworth, and like Burns, the matter-of-fact men who live by rule and method—the "punctilious" ambassador who is always correcting, or the rationalist friend who blames as "superstition" Lotte's innocent make-believe. He reads the poets of primeval life, long famous or freshly discovered, with new eyes. Homer and Ossian alike gloriously enlarge the horizons of his little world.

The catastrophe which closes this vivid life has often provoked demur. A scene of uncontrolled passion has compelled Lotte, scarcely less agitated than he, to close their relations. Werther sends to borrow Albert's pistols "for a journey." Lotte, with horrible misgivings, but unwilling to betray him to her husband, allows them to go. The next morning he is found in his chair with a bullet through his brain. It was a

morbid solution, and Lessing justly resented the statement that *Emilia Galotti* lay open on the suicide's desk. Goethe himself had solved his problem by flight, and, a few months later, was writing in boisterous high spirits amidst the gaieties of Frankfurt. He had grown so far out of his Wetzlar self that the meditated *Werther* romance hung fire. The news of the tragic close of a similar adventure to his own—the suicide of young Jerusalem in 1774—deeply stirred him and gave the needed stimulus. That solution he had put aside, but it had clearly been possible, even near, and he makes *Werther* adopt it without question of any other. In *Werther*, as in many other of his creations, Goethe rendered the less masculine currents of his nature. But it is difficult to resist a sense that for *Werther* too this close was not cogent; that Jerusalem's desperate abnegation of life is not a quite persuasively final act in a character which, with all its weakness, yet breathes from first to last the abounding vitality of its author.

## II. "WILHELM MEISTER"

*Werther*, a great poetic achievement, was there at the same time an act of self-liberation, which relegated not only the dangerous Wetzlar episode itself, but the mental disease "Wertherism," so far as Goethe was concerned, to the region of inert memories. But his power of putting the barren or noxious elements of the past decisively by was equalled by his tenacious hold of its fruitful germs. The second in origin of his romances illustrates quite as signally this conservative side of his rich and ceaselessly growing artistic nature. *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* covers, from its first inception to its publication, at least twenty momentous years (1777-97), and the history of the hero reflects substantially the history of its author's mind. Wilhelm,

at the outset, is near akin to the young advocate of Frankfurt, his destiny still uncertain, impassioned for literature, averse to business, intemperate in love. At the close he has emerged from error and illusion to attain a self-possessed security, like that which Weimar and Italy and the friendship of Schiller at length brought to the mature Goethe. And, though the early books of the novel were largely rewritten during the nineties, the shifting outlook of the poet has left deep traces in the conduct of the story. The coherence and unity of perfect art are wanting in *Wilhelm Meister*, as they are in *Faust* itself, but the gradual and discontinuous process of production which has robbed it of that excellence has given it a richness of intellectual content, a many-sided bearing upon the problems of culture, of art, on the problem, above all, of the art of life, which make this very imperfect novel a great and enduring book. From the outset it has provoked sharply antagonistic judgments, as only books thus steeped in the currents and counter-currents of a vital and growing soul can do. Schiller read its early chapters with "a delight which he had never received from any other pen" (*Correspondence with Goethe*, No. 32), and to his warm encouragement its completion is chiefly due. The Romantic poets exalted *Wilhelm Meister* to a pinnacle of unrivalled glory. Friedrich Schlegel classed it, with Kant's *Kritik* and the French Revolution, as the greatest event of the century. Goethe himself, whose lofty self-judgment was far above vain conceit, inclined to think it his greatest work. Abroad, its profoundly German cast of thinking, its complete detachment from novelistic tradition, and, in many quarters, its frank painting of a loose society, impeded its advance; even Carlyle, its most powerful English advocate, had groaned over the "heaps of rubbish" that encumbered its priceless pearls.

Towards the close of his life Goethe made an interesting comment to Eckermann upon the difficulties felt by his countrymen in discovering its "central idea." He ridiculed their passion for this kind of quest, but referred them, if they needs must find one in *Meister*, to the famous words addressed to the hero near the close: "You seem to me like Saul, who went out to seek his father's asses, and found a kingdom. . . . For, at bottom, the whole seems to mean simply that man, in spite of delusion and errors, led by a higher hand, reaches after all the happy goal."

This pregnant and far-reaching motive undoubtedly provides a rational framework for the loosely strung incidents of the story. It was, however, merely a luminous afterthought. The early version of the first books, recently discovered at Zürich, leaves no doubt that *Meister* was originally, as its first title, *Wilhelm Meister's Theatrical Mission*, would suggest, a novel of the theatre, devoted to vivid pictures of the life of actors and actresses, and expositions of the poet's own ideals of playing and of plays. In the complete and revised romance, the theatre is still the main subject of the first five books, and the dramatic vitality of the romance is concentrated here. The life of an eighteenth-century company of players could not be faithfully painted without offence to decorum, and Goethe has painted it with an unembarrassed vivacity, as far removed from pruriency as from prudery. The figures live and breathe, and their little encounters and entanglements are as fresh as if reported by an eye-witness. Yet they have the significance of types; they stand for representative varieties of histrionic humanity, and even of humanity at large. "Do you know, my friend," asks Jarno, after hearing Wilhelm's account of them, "that you have described not the theatre but the world?"

And it was partly because Goethe actually saw in the theatrical profession, as in the theatre itself, a kind of microcosm of the world, that he allowed it to retain so seemingly disproportionate a place even in the revised romance, where it stood for the "she-asses" that Wilhelm did not find. For the sober Melina, playing is a business, for the astute Serlo it is a game; Mme. Melina catches the sentiment of her rôle, the passionate Aurelia *becomes* it; Marianne is the fickle mistress, Philine the brilliant, heartless, and soulless coquette. Across this hard and somewhat sordid theatrical world passes the mysterious apparition of Mignon, tenderest of child-lovers, with her longing for Italy and her inviolable secret. To her, and to her companion, the old harp-player, Goethe has given some of his most wonderful songs; they are themselves subtle, impalpable as a song, strains of unearthly romance almost too sharply detached from the babel of discussion and intrigue across which they float. The only mind in whom they strike a kindred chord is that of Meister himself, who is responsive to every kind of music. Nominally the "hero," he has little of the "heroic" quality that conventionally attached, and attaches, to the central figure of a romance—far less than Hamlet, whom he simulates as well as expounds. He effects little, but, as Schiller said, almost everything happens with a view to him or on his account. The persons among whom he moves are definite and limited natures; he is mobile and sensitive, but full of unexhausted possibilities. He is quickly inflamed and lightly seduced; responsive to poetry, accessible to prose; he feels the wonder of Mignon, and answers to the lure of Philine. His versatility always has an air of vacillation; but the soil is rich, and we feel that he has a future. It is only in the Fourth and Fifth Books that the "apprentice" begins



to show some symptoms of the "master"; and it is just here that Wilhelm becomes most evidently the mouthpiece of the poet, himself now at the height of his mature powers. It is the autocrat of the Weimar stage who induces Wilhelm's unpromising troupe to undertake Shakespeare, and delivers the beautiful appreciation of *Hamlet*, which for the first time clearly stated, if it wrongly solved, the Hamlet problem.

But at this point a decisive change of temper and scene take places. The Sixth Book transports us from the intrigues and frivolities of these artists to the life of a religious devotee. The *Confessions of a Beautiful Soul*, is a romance of the inner life, inferior to the earlier books in vivid painting of manners, but, as a study in spiritual biography, of enthralling charm.

When the story of Wilhelm is resumed, in the Seventh Book, the pertinence of this episode becomes apparent. The ideal of the Beautiful Soul was in so far fallacious that it led away from practical and active life. But at the same time it marked an ascent into a society both of higher aims and better breeding and birth—a society, in short, like that of the Weimar court—and it is in such a society that Wilhelm, the burgher's son, now finds himself, like Goethe, an equal and honoured guest. Lothario, most enlightened of aristocrats, is a kinsman of the Beautiful Soul; but her spiritual fervour is transformed in him into a practical humanity which devotes itself to the tasks near by, and acts out his own famous motto: "Here or nowhere is thy America." An atmosphere of thoughtful and active goodwill, of care for the outer and inner well-being of men, pervades this society. In the company of the clear-eyed, practical Therese, Wilhelm sees the futility of his adventures with the art which holds up a mirror to nature; finding at length a solution for his wanderings and per-

plexities in the hand of the yet more finely-tempered Natalie—a beautiful symbol of Goethe's ideal of human hope, faith, and charity.

While Goethe was slowly elaborating these gracious but somewhat shadowy scenes, a young woman in an English parsonage was writing with astonishing swiftness and security her first novel. As a vigorous rendering of life and manners the later books of *Wilhelm Meister* cannot vie with any novel of Jane Austen. Her clear-cut figures are precisely what they appear, and suggest no more than they express. His men and women seem to be pieces in a spiritual drama, the purport of which is only partly disclosed; an atmosphere of ideas, of aims and issues, of concern for humanity at large which they symbolise, envelops, and for many readers obstructs, the process of the story. But some of these ideas are among the most pregnant that Goethe ever uttered. If they obstruct the process of the story, they flash a strange illumination upon the growth and the upbuilding of mind and character, from which all story flows. "If we treat men as being what they are, we make them worse; if we treat them as if they were what they ought to be, we bring them as far as they are capable of being brought." This maxim, which Therese admires, but only Natalie is able to put in practice, formulates, as it were for educational use, the distrust of calculation, the faith in the silent organic processes of Nature, which he finally found symbolised in Meister's salvation by error.

*Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre* was originally designed as a complete work. The sequel, known as the *Wanderjahre*, originated in a suggestion of Schiller's. But, like the Second Part of *Faust*, the scheme was laid aside, and when finally resumed, it was carried out with flagging powers both of purpose and execution. What we now

possess is a very imperfectly organised blend of story and doctrine. The main story is attenuated by its weight of symbolism, and retarded by the numerous short tales interspersed in its course, many of them without inner or outer relevance. In some of these tales, however, such as *Die neue Melusine* and *Der Mann von Fünfzig Jahren*, Goethe's inherited gift of story-telling may still be discerned. And if we apply the standard of philosophical romance instead of those of the novel, the dreamy fascination of this diffuse chronicle is not to be denied. It is an "old man's vision," fragmentary, disjointed, unequal, fantastic, but with wonderful glimpses into the heights and depths of experience. Goethe's second title for it, *Die Entsa-genden*, strikes the keynote. But "renunciation" with him was only another name for definite practical activity for the general good, and it is the spirit of resolute and enlightened energy that is preached in many tones in this somewhat invertebrate romance. Training for a special task is to replace versatile dilet-tantism. The pædagogic strain in the mind of the veteran Goethe manifests itself in the larger function assigned to authority. The people, like the individual, are to be trained in socially serviceable conduct by a wise and benevolent despotism. But the veteran Goethe was still a poet, and these maxims of a sober practicality are enforced and expounded through the medium of symbolic constructions, which breathe ideal aspirations and a vast if shadowy philosophy. Shakespeare's Ulysses compares the perfectly-ordered state to the system of the planets revolving in fixed orbits round "this centre." Goethe's ideal community is similarly symbolised in the final convergence of all the persons of the romance about the saintly "sun-maiden" Makarie, the spirit of renunciation, as the centre of their wan-

dering orbits. And in the most famous chapter of the book he gives a description of the religion of such a community—the religion of threefold reverence—which, with all its air of fantastic symmetry, marks the widest and the deepest synthesis of the diverse ways of religious history which had yet been achieved.

### III. "DIE WAHLVERWANDTSCHAFTEN"

The third of the romances of Goethe is still further removed than the second from the tastes and sympathies of the ordinary novel-reader of to-day. It was received with an outburst of mingled admiration and abhorrence; its technical mastery still excites the former feeling in all qualified critics, but with the public at large it hardly wins any longer even the success of scandal. Certainly it is not amusing; the conversations, uniformly charged with purpose and significance, are often wanting in colloquial vivacity, and the background of scenery and minor incident upon which the main story is thrown is, to our feeling, disproportionately spacious and diffused. But the main story itself has in it the very stuff of tragedy—the tragedy of a problem in living, carried out with the ethical seriousness and the logical rigour of Ibsen. It concerns, too, the problem of marriage, to which Ibsen so often returns. Edward, a rich baron, has married in middle life the object of his early attachment, both having been released by death from other unions accepted under family pressure. The old love is still alive, but its ghostly flicker draws no sustenance from the living forces of heart and brain. They are strikingly unlike,—Edward self-indulgent, impulsive, unstable; Charlotte sagacious, resolute, high-souled;—and this disparity of gifts and temperaments, over which their youthful passion had easily triumphed, now obstructs their endeavours towards

true union. Both instinctively seek satisfaction in friendship for their unconfessed disillusionment with each other. Edward invites an old comrade, a captain, to spend the winter with them, and persuades his wife, against her better judgment, to take her beloved young foster-daughter, Ottilie, into their home. The first effect of this arrangement is to draw the two men into close companionship apart from the two women. But other affinities soon assert themselves. The child Ottilie lavishes all her girlish idolatry, without thought of harm, upon Edward. He, less innocently, responds with ardour, for "it was not his habit to deny himself anything," and he has presently no other thought but to obtain a separation from his wife. With the blind passion of these two children, for Edward "has never grown old," is contrasted the controlled but powerful attachment of the mature and high-minded man and woman. The captain, a soldier of a rare and noble type, is in character and intellect worthy of Charlotte; in disciplined will he is even her superior. The double story thus set going is followed out with a psychological delicacy which belonged to the futur rather than to the past of the novel. Incidents are ingeniously, if too transparently, invented to exhibit the inner movement of feelings, as when the finished musical accomplishment of the captain and Charlotte is contrasted with Edward's slipshod performances on the flute, to the halting time of which Ottilie at the piano conforms with spontaneous ease, as if the same soul pulsed and blundered in them both. It is in Edward, as might be expected, that these inflammable elements first break decisively into flame. The night-scene in his wife's chamber, drawn with grave but terrible power, forms the crisis of the first part. They break no law, but their union, in which Charlotte is the unwilling accomplice, is in effect

an infidelity to one another, and their child, when born, is found to resemble Otilie and the captain. The household breaks up. The captain and Charlotte resolutely separate. Edward flies from his home, takes service, and rushes into battle, to leave it unwounded and only the more determined to win Otilie, his superstitious nature interpreting his immunity from hurt as a sign that fate means him to succeed. Otilie, on her part, undergoes a change. Her exquisitely sensitive nature has grown richer and deeper; she becomes less like Edward and more like Charlotte. Finally, a tragic event—the drowning of their child when in her care—wakens her to the guilt and horror of her passion for him, and she resolves to renounce him for ever, thus at the same time putting an end to the plan of separation in which Charlotte was now ready, for her sake, to acquiesce. The convulsion, however, has broken her strength. She never flinches in her renunciation, but she rapidly fades away. Edward, who could renounce nothing, but could not live without her, soon follows her in death.

A study of sex-attraction, like the “*Elective Affinities*,” cannot but be dangerous for some minds, and the taboo often placed upon it is in this sense justified. But the popular notion that it preaches a fatalistic surrender to passion is absolutely baseless. Certainly, Goethe feels profoundly the power of the attractions which disturb and cross one another in the intercourse of men and women, and his scientific enthusiasm sees in them something analogous to the affinities of chemical elements. He seems to be at the outset arranging an experiment in human chemistry, choosing his variously constituted materials, bringing them together in his crucible, and recording the reactions that result. Blind impulse and instinctive appetite have free play, and

their working is described with minute and fearless precision. But the object of the experiment is to exhibit the still greater potency of another ingredient—will, or character. Edward, the source of the whole tragic development, has in place of character, as Goethe said, self-indulgence, and he is as despicable to his creator as to any reader. Like the *Wanderjahre*, “The Elective Affinities” is built upon a definite “idea,” but there is no comparison in architectural quality between that pile of noble fragments and this symmetrical edifice. The whole series of persons are imagined primarily in terms of “self-control”; they form an ascending scale, from Edward, the complete plaything of circumstance, to the architect, who is nothing if not the master of his soul; and the sympathies of the author, in spite of the calm objectivity of his epic manner, are palpable throughout. He draws the captain with evident liking, and the enterprising Luciane, Charlotte’s daughter by her first marriage, with marked dislike. None of these figures reach a high degree of realism as character creations. Some are shadowy; and those that are most vivid are somewhat too simple and homogeneous to be completely human. Beside Meredith’s “Egoist” Edward is a sketch; and he can be disposed of in a formula, as Sir Willoughby cannot. What is most personal in them they owe to those infusions of his own most intimate experience, which flowed inevitably into Goethe’s most vital poetry. The noble character of Charlotte certainly shares traits with that of the old friend whose name he boldly gave her; and Ottilie is steeped in the light and warmth of his new friendship with Minna Herzlieb. His own artistic and horticultural virtuositities are responsible for the too abundant record of the improvements carried out in the gardens of the Schloss, and the amusements of its

owners and their guests. But these personal feelings and interests, whether calmly reminiscent or quick-throbbing and newly-stirred, merely play upon the surface of the book. It owes both its strength and its weakness to sustained and constructive imagination, and is both a storehouse of ripe wisdom and the most signal example in literature of a novel built upon a scientific idea.

## CHAPTER IV

### DRAMA

FOR the great European public, outside Germany, Goethe's dramatic work begins and ends with *Faust*. And it is true that most of the pieces upon which he lavished his versatile talent have some analogy or reflexion in that vast world-poem. Some of them were tentative adventures along paths which only there found the goal they sought. *Götz* and *Egmont* sprang from the same joy in the teeming energies and titanic strivings of the sixteenth century, which drew him to the legend of Faust. The unfinished *Prometheus* was the young poet's tribute to a yet mightier challenger of the gods. *Clavigo* and *Stella* breathe the passionate love-interest which animates the more overwhelming story of Gretchen. There was, too, a Mephistopheles in Goethe as well as a Faust; and a crowd of half-forgotten dramas and farces—*Das Jahrmarkt von Plundersweilen*; *Satyros*; *Götter, Helden, und Wieland*; *Pater Brey*, and others—sprang from the same fount of irony, wit, and humour as Mephisto's colloquy with the student, or the scene in Auerbach's cellar. And the stately allegoric entertainments, finally, of the later Weimar time, of which *Pandora* is the most splendid and *Des Epi-*



*menides Erwachen* the most historically notable, have their parallel in the allegoric scenes of the Second Part.

But there was one epoch of Goethe's life, and one group of his writings, which have no reflexion or counterpart in *Faust*. Between his arrival at Weimar (1775) and the Italian journey (1786) the original *Faust* received no important addition, for the reason, among others, that the Faust spirit in the poet himself was subdued by a more potent influence. Frau von Stein had, and could have, no part in the drama of limitless aspiration. But her spirit of gracious self-control found expression, as we have seen, in two dramas of another cast. The *Iphigenie* and *Tasso* are, after *Faust*, the most individual, as well as the noblest, dramatic utterances of Goethe. They are utterly unlike anything in English, and show no trace of the once so potent influence of Shakespeare. The English reader should, however, approach them through the less alien medium of *Götz*, the finest of the plays completed in his Frankfurt time, the result of the first powerful impact of Shakespeare's genius. These three have accordingly been chosen, with *Faust*, for notice.

### I. "GOETZ VON BERLICHINGEN"

In the charming letter which Walter Scott in 1827 wrote to the old master at Weimar, he recalls how, as a young man, he had translated Goethe's first drama, then at the height of its fame. We cannot wonder that it captivated him; for, alone among Goethe's works, it might be taken for a dramatic prelude to his own *Waverleys*. More than forty years before the first *Waverley* appeared, Goethe had struck the same rich vein of national historic story—had struck it only to abandon it immediately for quests utterly beyond

Scott's power to follow had he felt their lure. Another great English exemplar had indeed pointed the way. The histories of Shakespeare had inspired no important drama in England; it was reserved for the people whom Klopstock and Lessing had twitted for its weak imitation of Britain or France, to produce the first historical drama, as well as the first modern ballad of genius—Bürger's *Lenore*.

In the autobiography of Goetz of the Iron Hand the young poet found a subject extraordinarily congenial to the mood of "Storm and Stress" in which he had returned from Strassburg. A robber-knight in the eyes of most men, Götz von Berlichingen was, in his own, a self-appointed henchman of the Kaiser, fighting unbidden in his cause against the unruly estates of the realm. In Goethe's hands he is a noble and heroic figure, German in his rough-hewn strength, his *Treue*, his rugged tenderness, tragic in the imprudent magnanimity with which he surrenders advantages to his astute and merciless foes; for it was his way, we are told, "to make concessions when he had the upper hand." Such a man, with his inflexible independence and his stubborn loyalty, might have stood as a symbol of the German people, in whose history the passion for freedom and the passion for nationality are warp and woof. He is a fit hero for the first national historical play of Germany. In its earliest form the play did little more than put the rude memoirs into scene and dialogue. Herder's verdict upon this original draft, "Shakespeare has spoilt you!" sent him back to revise it, with the result that the loosely dramatised history acquired sequence and backbone, became more of a drama, and therefore more like Shakespeare. But this was involuntary. Shakespeare with the young Goethe counted chiefly as a symbol for every kind of revolt

against classical tradition ; and if Herder's charge was true, it was true no less that, in all the points at which the older dramatist infringes classical canons, Goethe out-Shakespeares Shakespeare. History, as Shakespeare understands and portrays it, is an affair of kings and nobles ; the people enter, for the most part, only as comic episode. With Goethe the fortunes of a great popular chief are the principal factor of the story, and occupy the whole foreground of the play, while Kaiser and bishop appear as ludicrously helpless lookers-on. Prose, again, in Shakespeare, mainly the speech of low life or homely occasions, becomes the uniform language of all classes ; and nowhere in Shakespeare are so many class-types assembled. The whole life of the German nation, in all its complicated and picturesque stratification, lives again in the animated disorder of this play. Between the court and the people stand the professions—merchants and counsellors, the lawyer Olearius, and the monk Brother Martin, soon to become a rebel on a grander scale than Götz. Among the lower ranks there is a yet richer variety—peasants and gipsies, watchmen, serving-men—and these in several nuances. So motley a multitude would necessarily have shattered the narrow space-and-time-limits of the classical play. But Goethe seems to violate them with deliberate zest. We are hurried to and fro with breathless speed, the scene in some places changing at every few lines ; an Elizabethan freedom of movement, which had to be severely curtailed when the play was at length put upon the Weimar boards.

The career of Götz, taken alone, could not have yielded a dramatic plot ; and the glowing enthusiasm for the German character and people which breathes through these stirring scenes made rather for a quasi-epic like *Henry V* than for a genuine play. It needed

the clash of personalities behind the clash of arms. Fresh and poignant memories of his own helped him, as so often, to solve the artistic problem. He had returned from Strassburg not only the "Stürmer und Dränger," not only the ardent disciple of Shakespeare, but also the remorseful (though not penitent) faithless lover of Friederike. An odd notion that, by pillorying himself, in effigy, in the play, he might in some sense atone for his wrong, led to the creation of the fascinating traitor Weislingen, who deserts the gentle Friederike-Marie, the sister of Götz, for the splendid sinner Adelheid, and plays the decisive part in the betrayal of Götz himself. Weislingen and Adelheid, like Edmund and the two sisters in *Lear*, are steeped in duplicity; they betray each other as well as their enemies, and their falseness is finally contrasted with the noble frankness and the fatal good faith of Götz. When Weislingen, the agent of the bishop's party, is brought in prisoner to the knight, and Götz generously releases his old friend on condition that he will remain neutral, the decisive step is taken which involves the hero's fate, and makes him tragic in the Shakespearean sense. Weislingen returns to court, is easily won to break his oath, and is rewarded with the hand of this German Goneril (rather than Lady Macbeth), who ultimately, after becoming the mistress of a serving-man, poisons her traitor husband. The noble and heroic knight whom Goethe admired, and the treacherous one whom he a little resembled, thus form the centres of contrasted groups, the minor figures in which resume the contrast, nowhere more happily than in Götz's incomparable Georg, truest and bluntest of serving-boys, and Weislingen's Franz, the passionate youth who dares to woo his master's wife, and does not rest until the haughty Adelheid, for her own purposes, has given him

his reward. And with Adelheid herself is finely contrasted the devoted and dauntless wife of Götz, Roman in her strength, German in her tenderness, secreting the last ration for her husband, but scorning, like Volumnia, to fear for his safety in the fray.

From *Götz*, with its national enthusiasm, its rapid and stirring plot, we turn to the two dramas in which, at some cost of robust strength, the classic beauty of Goethe's ripe art is most clearly seen.

## II. "IPHIGENIE AUF TAURIS." "TASSO"

Both dramas were conceived, and mainly written, at Weimar; both were completed in Italy; and in both the longing for the classic South breathes through forms and situations, assuaged by the "humanity" of the little German court. Among the modern dramas founded upon antique subjects, and framed upon a Greek model, hardly any rival the *Iphigenie auf Tauris* in stately grace. Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* surpasses it in splendour of explicit poetry, Racine, perhaps, in absolute finish of expression; but neither is controlled in the same degree by Greek ideals of style. But the Greek story, as told by Euripides, is modified at a vital point. The moving and dramatic situation remains: the Greek maiden, snatched from death at the altar to become herself a priestess of Artemis on the wild Tauric strand, where every stranger was condemned to die; her brother, Orestes, and his friend, Pylades, cast ashore upon this deadly coast, and about to incur the penalty at her hands; and Thoas, the Tauric king. The plot is the development of this situation, and issues in the escape of all three to Greece. But in Euripides this is effected by sheer strategy; the rude though not ignoble barbarian is outwitted by the clever Greek. In Goethe the decisive factor is not

intrigue but personality ; the noble soul of Iphigenia prevails with Thoas, as it had already brought healing to the darkened spirit of her brother, and they depart with his slow but free consent.

In *Tasso* the process is carried further still. Intrigue is not merely subordinated to personality ; it disappears altogether. The drama portrays the mutual relations of five persons, all in their several ways noble, gifted, and magnanimous ; from time to time the large undulations of the dialogue break into a crest, with a little noise and foam : these are the " incidents." The crowning of a poet ; the presentation of a book ; a quarrel, in which no uncourtly word is exchanged ; a fatherly arrest, committing the culprit to his own chamber in the palace, and after a few hours revoked ; a prospective parting, debated with agitation but not carried out ; the drawing of a sword, a rash embrace—of such delicate material as these is woven the fabric of the plot. The entire drama, one might otherwise say, is built upon subtle modulations of a single sustained note. But this note is so poignant and so searching, and the modulations so varied and so beautiful, that the imagination is held. The actual life of Tasso at the court of Alphonso of Ferrara, his desperate love for the princess and resulting captivity, might have furnished forth a melodrama of crudely harrowing appeal on the lines of Byron's *Lament*. But Goethe did not seek to harrow us. Even the catastrophe which closes Tasso's career is relieved of all its harshness ; his arrest has been ordered—but by the most humane of sovereigns ; no prison door opens for him, no guard rushes in to seize him, and by his side stands, full of counsel and encouragement, the firm friend who was once his foe. Tasso is indeed—in the noble image of the final lines—shipwrecked, the helm is shattered, and the

vessel splits, but the rock which threatened his ruin towers above the waves, and he can clasp it and be saved.

Goethe's mind was much occupied with the disparities between the poetic temperament and the calls and limits of practical life. In his own career they were reconciled on the whole with triumphant success; partly because he was himself eminently gifted with practical sagacity, partly because he found in poetry itself a means of recovering self-possession when overmastered by the lure of romance. In Tasso he saw a poet of another stamp; a shy romantic, unschooled in the world, who naïvely acted out his rapturous dreams, and whose dreams themselves, as mirrored in his poetry, were not rooted, like Goethe's own, in experience, but evolved by a brilliant and fertile imagination. He, too, is attached to a court, and is the most fascinating and gifted person it contains. But the charm he diffuses is mingled with compassion, and the devoted friendship, the all but confessed love which he excites in more than one, is nearly allied to the protective tenderness which women feel for helpless men. The four persons who compose his *milieu*, as represented in the play, share these feelings in finely but clearly discriminated degrees. Nearest stands the princess. Her high intelligence at once discovers the worth of her poet's long meditated epic, the *Jerusalem*, now at length complete; in crowning Tasso (i. 3) as the literary comrade of Ariosto, she anticipates the sentence of posterity. But the poet has done more than rouse her admiration, he has given her the new birth of a vital experience, and she is deeply grateful :

“I needs must honour him, and therefore loved him,  
 I needs must love him, since with him my life  
 Grew life indeed, as I had never known it.”

True, her love, pure and serene as moonlight, irradiates without warming, and neither craves nor admits any closer relation than friendship. Yet she cannot conceal it, and the half-confession that escapes her delicate reserve excites his passion to uncontrollable vehemence. His resolve to withdraw from the court is cast to the winds, he clasps her to his breast, she repels him and flies in horror-stricken revulsion, the duke is seen approaching, and all is over. Next to the princess her friend and guest, Leonore San Vitale, has the closest relation to Tasso. She describes his character with delicate insight; she appreciates his homage, and reciprocates it with a sentiment not untouched with romance; but her friendly zeal is quickened by a lively woman of the world's taste for intrigue, and the zest of exercising a brilliant tongue. If the princess, in her grave fervour, is of the kin of those she crowns, of Virgil, and of Tasso, the other, Leonore, marks her own kinship in the same scene by crowning his great rival, Ariosto. When Tasso is carried away by his ecstatic vision (i. 3) the princess listens eagerly, but Leonore tries to recall him to the present. And it is she who pronounces the famous apophthegm of Goethean wisdom, which conveys at the same time his final criticism upon Tasso :

“Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille,  
Sich ein Charakter in dem Strom der Welt.”

This criticism, almost disarmed by the tenderness of the two women, becomes very distinct and dominant in the attitude, not unkindly as it is, of the duke. Alphonso is glad to entertain the poet, and very willing to be eulogised in his book. He is irritated at his weaknesses, and impatient of the inexorable artistic conscience which continually deferred the completion of the poem and the beginning of his own renown. But



he is genuinely concerned for the distempered poet's welfare, prescribes and plans, like a humane physician, for his cure, and touches his sores, before the final provocation, with a velvet hand. Tasso in his frenzied resentment calls him a tyrant, as he calls the princess a "Siren." But Alphonso, like all the other persons of this almost oppressively harmonious drama, is fundamentally good; an ideal prince, in Goethe's eyes; needlessly compared—nay, identified—by German critics with Karl August, but fairly expressive of the temper of Weimar rule. Finally, in the secretary Antonio the genius of practical affairs becomes definitely at odds with the genius of poetry. Antonio has just returned from a successful diplomatic mission, and enjoys the fullest confidence of the duke. A man of the world, he glories in the mundane splendour of Ariosto, and responds with scarcely concealed irony to the ladies' praise of this young rival poet, who sang of heroic and strenuous adventure seated at ease in the pleasant shade which great workers, like himself, sought when their toil was done. To the ardent advances of Tasso he replies with chilling reserve; the poet, mortified to the quick and incapable of concealment, replies hotly, and at length draws. The gulf between the incorrigible poetic dreamer and the unsympathetic man of practical affairs appears to be final, and in any other world than this Goethean Ferrara, perhaps would be so. But now the assuaging and harmonising forces are brought to bear upon the sagacious spirit; he is summoned to take part, he also, in the tender remedial work; the antagonist is merged in the patient, a refractory and perverse one, but calling forth pity and patience in the physician, and finally, as we have seen, the strong hand of help.

Few plays in literature at all resemble Goethe's *Tasso*. Poets are of too little account with most audiences to

be safely made the centre even of poetic drama. The embarrassments and blunders of an artist, face to face with practical life, provide matter for the comic journals, but hardly, in most people's eyes, for serious and moving drama. Horne's *Marlowe*, De Vigny's *Chatterton* stand almost alone in their kind. A much better-known play than these, however, far removed in character and scenery from *Tasso*, comes very near in essence to Goethe's conception. *Richard II* is, among other things (for Shakespeare evades formulas), a tragedy of the poetic dreamer upon the throne. Richard and Bolingbroke confront one another, like *Tasso* and Antonio, the poet and the statesman, the man for whom ideas have the value of facts, and the man for whom facts are the text of ideas. Richard sees his whole desperate situation through a disguising glamour of imagery; and he at his deepest need retains, like *Tasso*, the gift of uttering his pain in melodious speech—

“Und wenn der Mensch in seiner Qual verstummt,  
Gab mir ein Gott, zu sagen, wie ich leide.”

Like Antonio, Bolingbroke watches in silence the beautiful writhings of the stricken victim (*Tasso*, v. 5, *Richard II*, iv. 1), but his is the silence of disdain. The alien types remain aloof to the end, and sympathy as little as compromise bridges the chasm. Shakespeare's humanity was as wide as Goethe's, and could do justice with as equal a hand to opposite and conflicting types of man. But he watched the conflict without repugnance, perhaps with an answering thrill, and gave it unchecked scope, ending most often in death, not conciliation. Harmony in a sublime sense assuredly belongs to his tragic art; but it is a harmony like Beethoven's, evolved out of clashing dissonances. Goethe's *Tasso* resembles rather the harmony of Mozart, an exquisite play and counterplay of kindred melodies.

In finished and pervading beauty it has no equal in German literature, and its beauty, as always in Goethe's ripest work, is not a glamour or an elegant disguise, but a choice and noble expressiveness, by which life, in the very act of being idealised, is interpreted and disclosed.

## CHAPTER V

## " FAUST "

*Faust* is Goethe's greatest work, the greatest poem, without doubt, of the nineteenth century. But it is not, like Dante's *Comedy*, or *Paradise Lost*, a consummate work of art, a rounded and finely articulated whole. It was a gradual growth; a space of sixty years separating its inception and completion, and it took the changing complexion of a mind which, fundamentally conservative and constant in its deepest instincts, was at the same time amazingly supple, sensitive, and fertile, and retained till the threshold of old age the enterprise and the freshness of youth. To such a mind the *rêve de jeunesse rempli en âge mur* may not be impossible, but the "dream" will have been transformed perhaps beyond recognition. Alone among the early dreams of Goethe, the story of Faust clung to him and would not let him go, surviving all changes, but also taking their mould, and in turn reacting upon them. "In whatever is of Goethe," says Erich Schmidt, "Faust has part."<sup>1</sup> Naturally, the earlier parts were largely rehandled to fit them to the later intention; but enough unevennesses and inconsistencies remain to make the history of the growth of *Faust* an indispensable preliminary to all intelligent study.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted, Meyer, *Goethe*, p. 341.

## I

Goethe's earliest work upon the Faust story goes back to the great seed-time of his poetry, the Frankfurt years (1770-5) which intervened between Strassburg and Weimar. It had been familiar to him from boyhood in chapbook and puppet-show, the latter preserving, through all its rude distortion, some hints of the grandeur and the horror of Marlowe's play. To the young Goethe of the Storm and Stress the story appealed in much the same way as it had done to Marlowe. Faust was the hero of a titanic adventure, who bartered his soul for superhuman knowledge and power, as Prometheus and Mahomet and Götz in their several ways had broken through the ordinary limits of human action. In its original form the poem, with some important gaps, was completed at Frankfurt. In this state Goethe read it to the court circle at Weimar, where it was afterwards copied by an admiring feminine hand, and thus happily preserved. The discovery in 1887 of this MS.—the so-called "Urfaust"—has for the first time placed the study of the genesis of the poem upon a secure basis. The "Urfaust" was much nearer than any later stage of the poem to the tragedy of Marlowe. Here, too, Faust finally forfeited his soul, and the play ended with the sudden apparition of Mephistopheles to claim it according to his bond. No flowery Elysium awaits him, no quickening chorus of spirits, no renewed life of resolute endeavour towards the best, such as the harmonising spirit of the later Goethe provided for his hero. As a poet, Marlowe was fully worthy to stand beside the author of the "Urfaust." But in two points he was immeasurably his inferior. He had neither Goethe's range and depth of

ideas, nor his insight into the passion of love. Marlowe's Faustus, like Goethe's, utters at the outset his contempt for all the traditional methods of human learning, and makes his compact with the devil for the sake of the deeper knowledge to be won by magic. But how crudely the deeper knowledge is conceived! It is at most additional *information*, to be furnished by the obliging fiend in verbal replies to his questions. Whereas, what the Faust of Goethe so passionately repudiates in the traditional sciences is that they offer just verbal "replies," words instead of vision; and what he ardently strives after and barter his soul for is the vision of what "knits the universe together, to see all potencies and seeds, and cease to traffic in words."

And it was reserved for Goethe to enrich the story with his brilliant device of a human and mundane Mephistopheles. Marlowe's fiend, though nobly imagined, and touched with the pathetic grandeur of Milton's, is still pure devil. Goethe's is a modern cynic and egoist, half-modelled on personal friends, like Herder and Merck, who had curbed or ridiculed his accesses of Faustish enthusiasm. But he is as unmitigatedly evil as Marlowe's and of a more superb self-confidence.

Marlowe, again, had used in his own way the tradition, which a gross public would have created if it had not existed, that Faustus employed his subject-fiend, among other things, in procuring him a mistress. But the wonderful vision of Helena, in which all the rapturous intuition of beauty, as the Renaissance felt it, is conveyed through impalpable words, has in it no breath of credible human love, and Helen passes as swiftly and as silently as she has come. Goethe chose rather to follow up another hint of tradition, which made Faust the lover of a girl of humble rank. It was the tragic story of Gretchen,

wooded, betrayed, and finally brought to early doom as the murderess of her child, that absorbed the imagination of the poet, even to the neglect of so crucial a scene as the compact. The scene of the duel, in which Faust slays her brother Valentine, was also first written at a later time ; but the "Urfaust" already offered the story, substantially as it exists to-day, in all its elemental and harrowing pathos. Moreover, the emphasis thus given to the tragedy of Gretchen really corresponded to its place in the drama of Faust. For his tragedy is, in this original version, involved in hers ; it is by ruining her that he has himself been caught in the snare of Mephistopheles ; the passionate eagerness for direct vision of the secrets of the universe, which impelled him to the compact, was, like the compact itself, only instrumental in bringing about this decisive crisis in the fate of both, first announced in Faust's appalling cry of remorse and horror in *Wald und Höhle* : "And I, the God-hated, was not satisfied to lay hands upon the rocks and shatter them [by Mephistopheles' aid], her, her peace I must needs destroy ! Thou, hell, must needs have this victim ! Help, fiend, to make brief my anguish ! What must be, let it swiftly be ! Let her fate overwhelm me, and common ruin seize us both !"

And the prison scene, where this agonised demand was, in the original version, actually fulfilled, remains, even as later attenuated, in its wonderful union of pity and terror, horror and rapture, inexorable fate and emancipating vision, the most poignant in the German language. Gretchen herself is the most pathetically artless of tragic heroines. She has been taken up into the very heart of a great poem without losing her air of the simple burgher-maiden. She has the thoughts and cares, the joys and sorrows, of her kind. She stands

apart from her fellows by no distinction of mind, no power of will, no force of character. If she is yet touched, as she surely is, with ideal beauty, the effect is everywhere conveyed through traits of the most lifelike reality. Her speech, exquisite and moving as it is, is of transparent simplicity, eloquent at times with the sheer force of passion or grief, but innocent of the splendours of imagery and phrase which make the little silk-winder of Asolo unlike all other silk-winders. Both Pippa and Gretchen are poetic creations; but Pippa is a child of the imagination, essentially lovely and unique, but attached to reality only by a few homely, familiar traits. Gretchen is a type, seen through an exquisite magic veil—that “veil of poetry from the hand of truth,” of which Goethe had the secret.

With all this, the greatness of the earliest version of *Faust* by no means lies wholly in its culminating tragedy. Faust himself already possesses, powerfully, if incompletely, drawn, the features which make him, like no other, a type of the intellectual genius of his country in the hour of its boldest reach and loftiest inspiration. His revolt from the futile scholasticisms of the past anticipated the titanic efforts of German philosophy in the next generation to transcend the traditional limits of knowledge. The wonderful scene with the “Erdgeist” holds in concentrated expression both the vision and the mystery of a universe informed by spirit. The Erdgeist’s song utters in a few phrases of superb poetry the slowly wakening ideas of the unity and continuity of the life of peoples and of man. “In the tides of life, in the storm of deeds, I throw the shuttle hither and thither and to and fro; an eternal ocean, a restless weaving, a glowing life; thus at the roaring loom of time I sit, and weave the Godhead’s living robe.” All the shallow materialism of the eighteenth century is

repudiated in that song. But its easy-going dogmatism is repudiated no less emphatically in the Erdgeist's crushing retort, immediately after, to Faust's ardent assertion of kinship :

“Thou who pervadest the wide world, O busy spirit, how  
near I feel to thee !

*Erdgeist* : Thou art like the spirit thou comprehendest,  
not me.”  
(*Vanishes.*)

Both the assertion and the retort mark the beginning of a new epoch in the history of thought. Their purport is put into less figurative but not less beautiful language in Faust's discourse on religion with Gretchen, which calls forth her naïve comment that the priest says nearly the same thing, “only in rather different words.” And then even this earliest Faust is inspired not only by purely intellectual passion ; the finite limits that he longs to transcend are not only the “phrases” and the formulas of human science, but the limits of his own individuality. He yearns to become one with all humanity, to embrace its uttermost joys and sorrows as his own, and so enlarge his personal self to the compass of the self of man. Thus, together with the intellectual idealism of philosophy, the social idealism, which was to find its distorted and ensanguined reflex in the French revolution, found utterance in the Faust of the young Goethe of the 'seventies.

## II

The history of the subsequent fortunes of the *Faust* poem is intricate, and, in some details, even to-day not altogether clear. It falls into two main divisions, each composed of several distinct phases ; the gradual elaboration of the “Urfaust” up to its completion as “the First Part of the Tragedy of Faust” in 1808, and its continuation in the Second Part from about 1800



to its completion a few weeks before Goethe's death in 1832.

In spite of the admiring reception it had found among his friends, the "Urfaust" remained untouched during the first ten Weimar years (1775-85). He carried the yellow MS. with him to Rome, but only added two scenes. With these, and some earlier passages now first included, it was published, in 1790, as *Faust, a Fragment*. Several years of quiescence followed. At length the urgency of Schiller prevailed, and the years from 1797 to 1800 saw the completion, in their present form, of the series of great scenes intervening between the departure of Wagner and the compact, with the compact scene itself. And to this majestic edifice he now added an imposing triple porch—the lofty and pathetic "Dedication," and the two Prologues, "On the Stage" and "In Heaven." Some fantastic relief was also introduced, with less happy effect, into the crisis of the tragedy.

These additions add greatly to the poetic splendour and intellectual reach of the poem. They also, however, bring about a radical transformation of the story, a new version of the Faust problem, in keeping with the bent of Goethe's riper mind. The influences of Weimar and of Italy tended to sap his interest in the entire Faust story, so alien, with its mediæval magic and its titanic daring, to the decorous "humanity" of Weimar society and his own neo-classic enthusiasms. And when he at length resumed the story, it was in a form upon which the humane and neo-classic culture of these years had decisively told. For the Goethe of 1796 the unrelieved tragic issue, above all, was no longer possible. Faust's crime remained, and Gretchen's sufferings, but their doom could no longer be the final word. Faust had somehow to prevail over Mephisto-

phes, and Gretchen somehow to be saved. The artist's reluctance to close on a crashing discord counted for something here. But it was reinforced by far-reaching convictions about the moral growth of man, and the relations of good and evil in the universe, which were now ingrained in the substance of Goethe's thinking. Man grew to goodness by a blind struggle; evil was not his damning failure, but a necessary incident in his upward path. The final test of a man was not the quality of his deeds, but his power of recovery. In that test a Faust could not possibly fail; even the seduction of Gretchen could only be a dark aberration from which he would advance to redeeming heights of achievement, and Mephistopheles be foiled of his prey. A vast continuation of Faust's story thus came into the plan—the great Second Part, of which the conception is at least as old as 1800.

But the frustration of Mephistopheles is only a symptom of the diminished importance of evil at large in the universe of the later *Faust*. It is no longer an antagonist contending on equal terms with good, but a subordinate and even subservient power existing to be overcome, and in the last resort a kind of good itself. Mephistopheles defines himself as a part of that "which ever aims at evil and ever effects good," and his occupation is carried on by the licence, almost in the employ, of the Lord of heaven. The power of good, on the other hand, grows all-embracing. Nature, which had allured but baffled him—"a splendid show, but, alas, a show only"—now speaks to him in field and forest. The Erdgeist, who had so sternly repelled his eager curiosity, is now the sublime and benign spirit who has given him all he asked. In Nature and in man he discovers a kindred soul responsive to his own.

These transforming ideas were directly concerned,

above all, in two great scenes : The Prologue in Heaven, and the Compact. Goethe has written nothing more sublime than the opening hymn of the three Archangels, nothing more admirable in its ironic humour than the colloquy of Mephistopheles with the Lord. Like Satan in the book of Job, Mephistopheles receives leave to assail the honest man ; he accepts the task with easy confidence, and lays a wager on his success. But the conditions of success are less simple than in the case of Job. Satan there had only to induce a blameless man to fall. Faust's character is still unformed ; he is still wandering in the dark ; he is bound to go astray. Mephistopheles will win his wager only if he can induce Faust to give up the struggle towards the right way of which " a good man in his darkest aberrations is always aware." And this wager he will clearly lose, for the Lord could not be deceived. But if he was to lose his wager with the Lord, his private arrangements for Faust's destruction—the compact with him for his soul—must also have broken down. The compact thus had to be such that Faust would seem to be securely in his clutches, while it yet enabled him to escape them. The conditions are fulfilled in the most famous passage of the scene now first composed. Faust is superbly conscious of his power to rise above the seductions of pleasure :

" If I ever lay myself at ease upon a sluggard's bed, let it be over with me at once ! If thou canst ever cheat me with flattery into self-conceit, if thou canst fool me with enjoyment, be that my last day ! There is my wager ! . . . If I ever say to the passing moment : ' Ah, stay ! thou art so fair ! ' then mayst thou strike fetters on me, then will I gladly perish ! "

And Mephistopheles promptly takes the offer, cynically confident that the pleasures he provides will exercise their ancient lure. " ' When, poor Devil, ' asks Faust

scornfully, 'was the lofty endeavour of a human spirit ever comprehended by thee or thy like?'” And the after-history pursued in the Second Part, and culminating in the frustration of Mephistopheles, justifies Faust's scorn, as Goethe intended it should. Yet, when all is said, it must be owned that the Gretchen tragedy, in itself so thrilling and so beautiful, is a strange sequel to the lofty disdain for the perishable joys of sense—"the food that sates not, the red gold that disperses, like quicksilver, in the hand"—with which he enters on his bond. True, Faust has undergone a magic renewal of his youth when the Gretchen story opens; but this scene (the witches' kitchen) was itself an afterthought, and exposes to some hazard the psychological unity of the poem. The real explanation is the historical one, that the Goethe of the Bond-scene was an older and riper man than the Goethe of the tragedy; and that a later phase in the history of the mind of Faust reflects an earlier phase in the history of the mind of the poet.

### III

The full purport of the Bond-scene is thus only discovered when we reach the great after-history to the tragedy unfolded in the Second Part. This is therefore no mere continuation but a vital factor in the whole, and Goethe in extreme old age came to believe, and to declare, that it had been present in his mind from the beginning. That Faust, in his earliest plan, was to be a lover of the Greek Helen is likely enough, for this was a central feature of the legend. But nothing is heard of such an episode until, in 1800, we find him reading the beginning of a "Helena" to Schiller. Twenty-four years later, the story of Faust and Helena became the nucleus of a vast drama in five acts, the execution of

which was the chief occupation of the last seven years of his green old age.

And the Second Part of *Faust* is, clearly, the work of an old man, yet of an old man in whom age had ripened almost as much as it had impaired. The genius of the dramatist has paled, but his mastery of poetic speech is as consummate as ever, and the thought even more pregnant and far-reaching. No single scene or character, not Faust himself, not Mephistopheles, approaches the intense vitality of the people in the First Part. A dreamy light lies about this stately pageant of mediæval emperors and Greek divinities, which seems to be emancipated from reality as well as from time. What is really vital in the Second Part of *Faust* is the ideas; the conceptions of human life, nature, and destiny, for which he found these often shadowy, often only too transparent symbols; and the intellectual consistency of these last conclusions of Goethe's serene wisdom contrasts strikingly with the splendid incoherences of the greater First Part.

Faust is from first to last a heightened Goethe, and something of the altered temper of the Second Part is reflected in the deliberately planned transformation which now befalls the mind and character of the hero. He has emerged from the blind illusions and the titanic strivings of passion to pursue a path of tempered activity in the clear light of day. The Faust of the First Part is still a prey to the impulsive passion of Werther; the Faust of the Second has only too much of the serene ordered activity of the statesman of Weimar. The opening scene, as a picture of hallowing and restorative calm after storm and tumult, can only be compared with the opening of the *Purgatorio*, where Dante and his guide emerge from the gloom and horror of Hell into the clear dawn light beside the southern

sea. Faust lies stretched upon the flowery turf, in a pleasant country, before daybreak. Benign spirits hover round, assuaging his bitter memories with choric songs of wonderful beauty, framed to the four watches of the night. The first, a "serenade," breathes the healing calm of sleep; the second brings before the troubled soul the image of the starry sea with its ordered quiet; in the third, at dawn, we see Nature becoming alive, and the seed burgeoning towards harvest; "bury the past and trust the new day!" Lastly, the "reveille" calls on the slumberer to throw off the "veil" of sleep, and gird up his loins for noble action, assured that nothing is impossible to the man who dares and understands. Then a tumultuous roar, the opening of cavern gates and the crashing of chariots, announce the coming of the Sun; and Faust, with pulses quickened, looks forth upon the new glory of awakening earth, and resolves that he will strive without ceasing towards the noblest life. But not in the old blind impetuous way. Like Prometheus he had thought to kindle the torch of life: a sea of fire overwhelmed him, a confused tumult of joy and sorrow, love and hate, and he sought once more the shelter of earth. He had gazed upon the full glory of the sun, but now, dazzled and bewildered, turned away from its intolerable splendour to watch its rainbow image in the mists that rise above the surging torrent of human affairs. That image, for ever dispersed but for ever renewed, was the symbol of man's endeavour; our life is drawn from the iridescence of the world.

Thus opens the renewed duel between Faust and Mephistopheles, which is to be carried on with bewildering wealth of circumstance through a poem more than twice as long as *Hamlet*. Faust's more reasoned and temperate aims do not diminish the risk that he will

forfeit his bond ; he may be on the side of the angels, but the purer and more solid pleasures he will now achieve will more easily tempt him to find complete satisfaction in the passing moment. Once more, as in the First Part, the alluring ideal is presented in the form of a woman. Helen of Troy is indeed pale and bloodless beside Gretchen ; and if Faust woos her and wins her, and has a child by her, nothing more tragic is portended by these events than that he is captured by the spell of classic art ; that the soaring spirit of Romance, in his person, seeks to complete itself by union with the measured spirit of antiquity, in hers ; and that of the union is born a spirit admirably compounded of the two, in the person of—Lord Byron. How deep and how prolonged was the sway of antique art upon Goethe the whole of his later life shows ; and this story of Faust and Helena, which occupies the entire third act, was for him, as we have seen, the nucleus of the whole. The nucleus, but not the climax. For art was not, as Matthew Arnold's famous line suggests, the last word of Goethe. It was not the "refuge" in which he still found "truth" when other ideals failed. In the cultivation of beauty he, like Schiller, had once seen the supreme instrument of education. But this, though inspired by Greece, was not a Greek idea at all. "The beauty of body and mind that fascinates the romantic classicist," as Professor Santayana says, "was not a product of idleness and sentimentality, but of orderly war, religion, gymnastics, and deliberate self-government."<sup>1</sup> And Goethe, too, saw with growing clearness that for man's full stature there is needed not merely self-culture, however refined, but self-devotion. And Faust partially sees this too. At the opening of the fourth act the vision of Helen and Hellenism is descried far away,

<sup>1</sup> *Three Philosophical Poets*, p. 180.

a majestic radiant cloud on the eastern horizon. Mephistopheles has once more failed to win his wager. But Faust is already busy with plans for the active service of man. He dreams of reclaiming land for cultivation from the barren sea ; and we finally see him the autocratic ruler of a tract of such land won by his own agency. It provides support for a new population ; but comfortable prosperity is no part of Faust's ideal ; as he himself is for ever unsatisfied, so his people must win life and freedom every day anew in the struggle with encompassing danger and want. For the freedom daily conquered is alone truly won : this is the final conclusion of Faust's wisdom and of Goethe's. And in the forefeeling of a national life thus founded upon ceaseless conflict with ceaseless need, Faust, now very old, and blind, feels that he could justly bid the passing moment stay. It is his highest moment, and his last. As he utters the words, he sinks back dead. Mephistopheles scoffs at the poor incorrigible romantic who, after storming through all the pleasures of a full life, found his supreme happiness in this brief and futile dying contemplation of the prospective happiness of others ; and he confidently claims to have won the wager. But has he ? The point is hotly debated by the critics. Not, certainly, in the letter ; for Faust has not actually bidden even his highest moment " stay." Nor yet in spirit ; for what he enjoys is not the hollow satisfaction of Mephistophelean " pleasure," but the triumph of the principle of being eternally unsatisfied, which Mephistopheles is unable even to comprehend. That Mephistopheles has lost his wager with God is even clearer ; Faust, who " served the Lord blindly " at the beginning, serves him with open eyes, and to more purpose, at the end. Faust, then, had to be saved ; nor would any other issue have been tolerable to the



lofty optimism of Goethe. But he chose to overlay this climax of his hero's fate with a profusion of symbolic incident drawn from Catholic legend and ritual. Much of it is trivial or operative; but through the questionable details struggle sublime convictions, which at length ring out in the angels' song as they bear Faust's soul aloft:

“Wer immer strebend sich bemüht,  
Den können wir erlösen.”

“He who strives without ceasing, him we can save.”

The mystical elements of Goethe's thought became more dominant in his last years, and while man's “ceaseless striving” remains the first condition of his “salvation,” he is now more conscious than before of powers, in Nature and humanity, in earth and heaven, which as “great allies” work with man in the struggle, and thus concur in “saving” him. The angels and fathers and holy women, Mary and the “penitent, once called Gretchen,” symbolise a heaven which stood less severely aloof than the Lord in the *Prologue* from struggling man. But the stress of Goethe's purpose does not lie in the thought of heaven “stooping,” as Milton said, to the aid of feeble virtue, but in the thought of man “drawn upward,” by his passion for an ideal “infinitely attractive and essentially inexhaustible,” towards a heaven which is nothing but this endless pursuit seen in the transfiguring light of the eternal relations of things. For in this light, declares the mystic chorus in the great closing verses, the finished and finite is seen to be but an image, while insufficiency is discovered to be perfect fulfilment:

‘Alles Vergängliche  
Ist nur ein Gleichnis,  
Das Unzulängliche  
Hier wird's Ereignis,

Das Unbeschreibliche,  
 Hier wird's getan,  
 Das Ewig-Weibliche  
 Zieht uns hinan."

## CHAPTER VI

## THE WISDOM OF GOETHE

"Physician of the iron age,  
 Goethe has done his pilgrimage.  
 He took the suffering human race,  
 He read each wound, each weakness clear,  
 He laid his finger on the place,  
 And said, Thou ailest here, and here."

So wrote Matthew Arnold in 1850, eighteen years after the poet's death. The two generations that have since passed have even enhanced the physician's fame, but they have probably diminished his clientèle; he has more glory, but fewer patients, and there is a widespread impression that his prescriptions, excellent in their day, are a little out of date. But many a wise old doctor, who no longer prescribes, is good to consult.

Goethe's wisdom is not a compact body of thought; as little is it a collection of empiric rules or practical nostrums. It is the unsystematised expression of a mind which never ceased to grow, which answered intensely to the call of the passing moment, and took its changing colour, but yet persistently strove to find coherent meaning in the stream of this vivid experience, to discover totality in the moving phantasmagoria. His strength lay primarily in the combined clarity and depth of his intuition—in the observant gaze which, as Schiller finely said, apprehended things so quietly and so lucidly that he was never in danger of being deluded by arbitrary speculation or capricious fancy. The experience he thus vividly apprehended was immensely

varied and rich, and he possessed it in a memory at once faithful and critical, which clarified and concentrated its images without disturbing their contours or altering their expression.

Experience, thus apprehended and thus retained, is the ground of Goethe's thinking, its strength, and, on the whole, the limit of its strength. If we would discover the boundaries of his power, we have but to call into comparison the men who have transcended experience on the wings of philosophic speculation or of mathematical reasoning, of visionary ecstasy, of the romantic idealism which "leaves the earth to lose itself in the sky," of the imagination which creates a new earth and new heaven. Not merely Kant and Newton, but Lucretius and Dante, carry our thought far beyond the limits of our experience compared with Goethe.

But within this field he moved with a range and mastery probably never surpassed. He lived in the moment, he fastened on the object; but imagination and thought and passion, all alive and alert, co-operated instinctively with eye and ear, and the "flower in the crannied wall" became instinct with import and suggestion, without ceasing to be a very flower. "*Individuum ineffabile*," he once wrote, "the individual is inexpressible: I educe a world from that phrase!" The instinct which made Blake see "a world in a grain of sand" lay deep in Goethe too, but for him the grain of sand remained a vital part of the "world," whereas for Blake its worth lay in the mystic vision it provoked. "Nature," the visible earth, which Blake said obstructed his poetry, was for Goethe, as for Wordsworth, one of its first conditions and richest springs. His imagination was, in the main, transfigured memory; his thought brooded and penetrated, if it did not climb and soar; he digged where he stood; his ethics was the

acceptance of the duty nearest at hand, his idealism the recognition that "here or nowhere is thy America"; and the last word of his religion was "reverence for self." These maxims were the very antithesis of the parochial philistinism which "cultivates its garden" careless of all that happens beyond its little plot. Their essence, and the pith of Goethe's wisdom, was precisely that the little plot is large enough to hold a perfect life, and that reverence of self, fully grasped, implies the reverence of all other things above and below.

There is thus in all his wonderful versatility a deep-seated unity of ground which at once distinguishes it from the volatile accomplishment of the dilettante. Science, art, friendship, love, poetry, administration, he explores them all, he achieves enduring things in all, he is fundamentally the same in all. To all he brings the eager appetency of life, the passion for first-hand experience, the impatience of the merely derivative and traditional, which is the glory of Faust and the chief source of his perennial interest and charm. In all these spheres the essence of what he achieved lay in some kind of enduring import given to, or evoked from, the freshness of a first-hand impression. To do this is the problem of all art, of all science, of all life, which is real in its method and ideal in its aims; and Goethe characteristically found the prerogative of man, as we have seen, in his power of "making the moment endure."

## I

Thus his lifelong devotion to *natural science*, which at times estranged him from poetry, was simply one application of his eager and fruitful intuition. The abstract processes of mathematics, to which physics already owed so much, evaded and provoked him, and

his unshakable faith in his senses betrayed him into the chief intellectual disaster of his life—his ridicule of Newton's doctrine that seven coloured rays compose white light. Even microscope and telescope he held to "confuse the pure human sense." The attempts of the great naturalists, again—of Cuvier and Linné—to arrange the infinite diversity of animal and plant life in genera and species seemed to him like copying Nature in mosaic. But there was insight as well as prejudice here. His distrust of speculation, his insistence on the truth of the senses, anticipated the anti-intellectualism of Bergson and James. His detestation of system and classification sprang from a deep sense of the unity and continuity of natural life. Where others saw mechanical fixity and distinction, he saw organic growth and gradual metamorphosis. His revolt against kinds anticipated Darwin, though reached by a totally different avenue. Progress by "struggle" was an idea wholly foreign to him. His persuasion of the organic continuity of Nature rested, indeed, upon no scientific scrutiny of facts. It was a kind of postulate demanded by the ingrained habits of his mind, but powerfully fortified by the root-principle of his philosophic master, Spinoza, that in all change something remains the same. We need not wonder that a conception so largely *à priori* was often uncritically applied. He treated it as a master-key, to which all the locks of the natural world would answer, as a touchstone by which all hypotheses about it might be tried. It sometimes misled him, as in the unlucky speculations on colour; sometimes led him by too short a cut to decisions, in fact right, of which he had not mastered the grounds, as in his scornful dismissal of the catastrophic theory of the older geologists. But it also at times furnished him with a clue to genuine discovery. It was his good fortune to apply

his organic intuition to biology at a time when this infant science, slowly disengaging itself from the mechanical traditions of physics, stood most in need of just that method of approach. It was thus that he achieved his two well-known equations, of the flower with the metamorphosed leaf, of the brain with the expanded spinal cord.

## II

If poetry and science were closely interwoven in Goethe's life, it was not because either was a relief or a relaxation from the other, but because they were for him, as for Wordsworth, closely akin. Wordsworth called poetry the "impassioned expression" which is in the countenance of knowledge; Goethe's conception of poetry, and of *art* in general, is even more deeply imbued with the animus of the knower. The real world is the ground and matter of both art and science; both seek to discover and disengage its typical and significant forms. For science these are the basis of law, for art they are the basis of beauty. In the noble human types of Greek sculpture art and science met. Art was thus one in aim with Nature; it continued and completed her unconscious and confused endeavours, creating the characteristic and expressive types towards which she blindly strove. Beauty was to be discovered and revealed, not invented and imposed; and Goethe could thus denounce alike the Naturalism which professes to reproduce actuality in all its confusion and ugliness, and the "rose-pink Idealism" (as Meredith called it) which shrinks from the grip of reality and substitutes for it some arcadian faerie of its own. The strength of this position lay in the ground it afforded for an art at once poetic and real; for reality had, first of all, to be faced and held. Imaginative absorption in

a real experience was the beginning of art, and in proportion to the imaginative quality of this experience the accidental and insignificant elements in it fell away, and the universal and typical elements came into full view. This was a very different process from the "squaring" of reality with fixed notions. "Art and Nature are both," he said, "too great to work by *design*." Goethe put away as energetically as Wordsworth, though in more critical language, the "meddling intellect" which misshapes the beautiful shows of things, and overlays them with rhetorical decoration and arbitrary device. In this sense he could say pregnantly, "Poetic matter is matter of one's own life"—his final judgment upon the poetry of mere fancy. "A poet never dreams," Goethe might, in this sense, have declared with Browning; and when he looked back upon his work, at the close of his long life, he thought his greatest service had been in "liberating" those who learnt his lesson from the lure of the shimmering, unsubstantial dream-world of the Romantic poets.

But the "ideal" side of his doctrine was not less emphatic. If he took poetry "from the hand of Truth," it was yet a "veil" that he received, "woven of morning mist and sunny radiance." The poetic elucidation of reality, by bringing out its hidden significance and dropping out its irrelevant detail, set an appreciable hiatus between poetic realism thus conceived and Naturalism. It admitted, for instance, the use of verse, which a consistent Naturalism necessarily excludes. Were verse only an added ornament, as Wordsworth in the weakest passage of his Preface thought, it would stand condemned with every other kind of mere decoration. But verse, as Coleridge saw, naturally consorts with, and in its turn heightens, the emotional excitement of poetry; and it both expresses

and quickens the imaginative process out of which issues the clarified soul of actual experience. It was by thus lifting his own passionate experience into ideal significance that Goethe himself found in poetry a deliverance from the burden of actuality.

### III

The same fundamental attitude of mind determined Goethe's *ethical* thinking, his ideals of conduct, his criticism of life. As enduring poetry had to be fraught with the intense experience of an individual mind, so the way to rightness in conduct did not lie through conformity to a set code of general maxims, but through the fulfilment by the individual of its own supreme needs. Personality thus lies near the root of his ethics as of his art. *Individuum ineffabile* once more. The objective clearness with which he seized every experience, and the passion for totality which impelled him to seek in each universal significance, would have made it natural for him, even without the aid of Spinoza, to find in the individual the clue to all enduring value, the "semblance of eternity." In the young Goethe of the Storm and Stress, of *Prometheus* and the "Urfaust," his rooted individualism appears in its most revolutionary form. But even here it is far removed from egoism. It is shot through with the sense of the infinite pulsing life of humanity at large and of Nature, the divine universe of which each man was a part. Faust aspires not to trample brutally upon his fellow-men, but to enlarge his single self to the universal self of humanity. And with Goethe's advance in maturity of mind and character the consciousness of the power and the claims of the external forces which environ the individual life became steadily more urgent. The individual never ceased to be the focus of his ethical



interest, wisdom, and insight ; but the problem of its well-being became more and more complicated as his recognition of the limiting and furthering conditions grew more complete, and at every step it detached itself more clearly from light and complacent self-indulgence.

The "development of one's individual powers" was a duty on which Goethe never wearied of insisting. It was the bed-rock of his ethical thinking. But it had been a familiar idea since Rousseau, and entire systems of education, like that of Pestalozzi, had been evolved and put in practice under its inspiration. The specifically Goethean ethical teaching is derived from his application to the doctrine of development, of the demand for *self-control* and for *action*. That human life, like that of Nature, is a process ; that when we cease to grow we, no less than the flower, cease to exist, was Goethe's conviction ; but he allowed no room to the idea which might seem to follow, that we may then stand passively by and watch Nature developing us "without our stir" ; nor did he hold that our development is to be effected by the absorption, on whatever scale, of the "best that has been written and thought," according to the Arnoldian conception of "Culture."

Goethe, like all great poets, had a feminine side ; he could share in Werther's emotional self-abandonment, in Epimetheus' ecstatic adoration : and the Goethe of English legend was indeed little more. But no less his was the shaping and masterful force of Prometheus, the practical sagacity of the minister of Weimar, even the ironic common sense with which Mephistopheles confronts the headstrong passion of Faust. In the true Goethean self-culture Prometheus and Epimetheus are equally concerned. The ecstatic vision, the subtle

sensibility, remain, but "the greatness and beauty we encounter must be woven into our inmost being, must beget a new self in us, and so live on in us, shaping and creating." Only by thus transforming our experience into something individual and our own do we truly live. And a first condition of this vital appropriation of experience is the power to choose, among the infinite allurements presented to us, what we need, and to reject what is for us irrelevant or disturbing—the power of *self-control*.

Nothing better attests the wonderful range and intensity of Goethe's sensibility than the prominence in his ethics of the doctrine of self-control. A man so possessed by the passion for growth and construction would never have insisted so emphatically on this negative or disciplinary side of it, had not the extraordinary richness and delicacy of his own intellectual and emotional nature been a very real peril. Nor was his emphasis that of the repentant sinner, warning others from the snare he had himself fallen into. Even when most nearly Werther he had known how to stop short of being Werther altogether. He can thus use, quite naturally and quite legitimately, a language which resembles that of the Stoic or the Christian moralist, insisting, in many varieties of accent, upon "renunciation"—"Entsagung." The morality of self-development had a conscience of its own, an exacting, argus-eyed mentor and critic, subjecting the infirmities of the mere pleasure-lover and the mere ascetic to an equally stern reproof. Every man was, it is true, in a certain sense, a law to himself. What, for him, was right depended primarily not upon any external code, but upon the laws and conditions of his own being. But his way to this rightness could be won only by persistent self-mastery. "In every nature there is a kind of truth; but a man must control himself."

By "self-control" and "renunciation," however, Goethe meant something other, and less, than the self-sacrifice of Christianity, the "dying to live" of Hegel, or the "living for others" of Comte. It was for him a doctrine not of absolute but of relative sacrifice—a doctrine not of loss, but of subordination, the surrender of the lower for the sake of the greater, of the passing impulse for the sake of the enduring aim, of vain regret for the sake of life and work. The elegiac temper which broods mournfully over the vanished and irrevocable past Goethe condemns with the sternness of one who had known and mastered such regrets. "You are not furthered," he warned "young poets" in his last years, "by perpetually lamenting a lost mistress. Keep up with the pace of life, and test yourselves on occasion; it will then be seen whether you are alive." "If, at the threshold of active life, we seek to recover the dreams and desires and amenities of the past, the Muse takes leave and seeks the society of him who cheerfully resigns and lightly recovers, who can win a grace from every season, . . . who silences his own sorrows, and searches actively around for a chance to soothe another's sorrow and further another's joy." That is the Goethean temper. It is the temper of Faust, "recovering lightly"—too lightly—from the horror of Gretchen's doom to go forth with the new day for new achievement. It is a temper which misses some of the great things in life, which admits reluctantly the pity and terror of tragedy, the consecration of death. Dante, raising to the glory of Beatrice his colossal poem devoted to the "furtherance" of man, embraced the past and the future, memory and hope, at once.

Yet Goethe's doctrine of self-control is not without its great and heroic aspects. The solitary soul has to struggle with the welter of alien life which surges up in

its depths and invades it from every side. In this stress of "storm within and strife without," nothing can save it but self-mastery; and nowhere is man's power to emancipate himself, if he will, from the thralldom of mechanical forces proclaimed with more magnificent assurance than in the famous verses of the "Geheimnisse":

"Von der Gewalt die alle Wesen bindet,  
Befreit der Mensch sich, der sich überwindet."

Yet even "freedom" was no absolute good. It was of value only as a condition of the upbuilding of character. "Whatever liberates without giving self-mastery corrupts" (*Sprüche*). And yet more pregnantly, in the close of *Faust*, he denies that true freedom can be had at all save by the effort which daily conquers it anew. The man who announced this strenuous doctrine as "wisdom's last word" was far indeed from the Schopenhauerish pessimist of Arnold's *Memorial Verses*, who sought refuge from the illusions of life in Art, which "still had truth."

So far indeed is Goethe, in his ethical teaching, from exhibiting the bias of the artist or the thinker, that he hardly allows intuition, or theory, a voice in the determination of conduct at all. "We learn by action, not by contemplation." "Only by action do we know ourselves." Nay, quite in the spirit of the modern pragmatist: "What is fruitful, that alone is true." How are we in practice to choose the right course? Aristotle defined it as the mean between two extremes. No, said Goethe, what lies between the two extremes is just the problem, to be decided only by conduct. And to the question how conduct itself, then, is to be determined he replies with the simple but pregnant maxim: "Do the day's work"; or, in Carlyle's paraphrase: "Do the duty which lies nearest to thee, and thy further duties will already have become clear."

Yet we must beware of accentuating overmuch the practical side of these maxims. Goethe was no Franklin, and his counsels will not replace "poor Richard's" shrewd recipes for turning every penny to the best account, and saving nine stitches by taking one in time. His concern with the day's "work" is not that of one whose interest was absorbed in its incidental gain or loss, but of one who saw in it a moment in the ethical upbuilding of the soul, who felt that to do one's duty, even by surrender of happiness, is to become truly oneself, to "realise" oneself, and thus to grow at one with the eternal creative forces of the universe. "Das Ewige" is not to be known, but to be lived; by action we do in some sort clasp that infinite Nature which mocks our speculative search with a mere iridescent reflex.

#### IV

Goethe's *politics* are but an application of his ethics. His pronounced ethical individualism is the clue to his attitude towards the community, the State, and humanity at large.

No school of political thinking, least of all that which regards the State as an end in itself, overriding at need the interests of all its members, finds complete satisfaction in the political ideas of Goethe. To him the State is from first to last a means, a humanly-fashioned instrument for securing the culture of the component individuals. And his ideal State was one in which, as at Weimar, a benevolent and discreet authority provided merely shelter and protection for the cultural process carried on independently by its members. Later in life, as the autocratic elements of his intellect gained ascendancy, he threw upon the State a larger and larger share of the cultural process, even to the

choosing of wives. Genuine social feeling Goethe had at a time when public life did not exist in Germany. But the very extravagances of his State-socialistic Utopia show how alien, at bottom, the matter and methods of politics were to his mind. Equally unpolitical was his way of conceiving the relation of States to one another. That Goethe was no patriot is an old but misleading charge. He acquiesced easily in the French domination, which, under changed political forms, permitted the cultural life of Germany to go on undisturbed. He admired unreservedly the dæmonic power of Napoleon, and derisively bade his countrymen, at the great rising of 1813, "rattle their chains." He opposed all narrow and exclusive patriotism, and paid generous tribute to the genius of other nations. But no German had a loftier idea of the capacity and the destiny of the German people. This destiny, however, needed precisely, for its fulfilment, the sympathetic appropriation of the cultural gains of all the nations. "The German's mission is to become the representative of all the world's citizens." Goethe's cosmopolitanism was built upon his lofty ideal of national life, as this upon his yet loftier ideal of the life of the individual. The world was "an expanded fatherland."

## V

Even more than his social and political ideals, Goethe's thoughts about *religion* are deeply imbued with the habit and instincts of his mind. For daring speculations he had neither gift nor relish; he shrank from all attempts to produce a final formula for the universe. "We are both alike," he wrote to a friend. "Particular things you apprehend powerfully, but the Whole goes as little into your head as into mine." His attitude to

the traditional creeds was not uniform ; he had phases of pietist devotion and of anti-Christian scorn, and with old age came a certain approximation to Christian orthodoxy. But it is not in these moods nor for these conclusions that we now go to Goethe ; they are abundantly represented by lesser men. His value for us lies, primarily, less in the religious ideas that he expresses than in his repudiation of what is secondary and derivative in religion. He demanded here also first-hand experience, direct intuition, as the beginning and ground. That the " religions " might be as diverse as the individuals he knew well ; it was not a conclusion to disturb the great poet of the individual soul. " There is an inner universe as well as an outer ; hence the world-wide usage by which every man calls the best he knows his God, and commits heaven and earth to his charge."

With Goethe himself this was eminently so. What was divine for him was the life working creatively in and through the world, visible to the eye, felt in the heart, yet in its ultimate nature mysterious and unfathomable, resisting all our terms and formulas. " Who can *name* God," asks Faust in the famous " Confession " in the garden scene, " and say, I believe ? Who can *feel* Him, and bring himself to say, I disbelieve ? . . . Name is sound and smoke over-clouding the glow of heaven." This intuitive yet ineffable religion of Faust is the loftiest expression of Goethe's poetic realism, of his faith in the veracity of what he sees and feels, and also of its mysterious and undefinable import. Among the thinkers of the past it was chiefly Spinoza in whom he found what he needed—the " god-intoxicated " logician who had infuriated the theologians of his time by declaring that the outward and inner world are particular aspects of God. Goethe is, with Spinoza, the

first great representative of the modern revolt against the orthodox dogma of a fallen human nature, and the deist dogma of an absentee God. Man errs as long as he strives; but no external Redeemer, only his own striving through error, can bring him salvation. And Goethe never qualified his scorn for the deist's God, who stood outside the universe, "shoving it on," or "revolving it round his finger:"

"Ihm ziemt's, die Welt im Innern zu bewegen,  
Natur in sich, sich in Natur zu hegen,  
So dasz, was in ihm lebt und webt und ist,  
Nie seine Kraft, nie seinen Geist vermisst."

Shelley, not many years later, conveyed this thought, in poetry less pregnant but more intense when he sang, in the great stanza of the *Adonais*, of

"That light whose smile kindles the universe,  
That beauty in which all things work and move."

Goethe, like Shelley, goes further and deeper when he imagines than when he reasons; and, just as the *Adonais* is truer to the spirit of Shelley than his polemical "atheism," so the spirit of Goethe's religion is better expressed in the great Confession of Faust than in many an oracular dictum of his letters and conversation. But the flagging imagination of his later years produced one noble complement and crown of his utterances on religion, which, under widely different terms and symbols, has its root in the same recognition of the "visible invisible" mystery of Nature and man. "Reverence" (*Ehrfurcht*) is now, for him, the key-word of religion, and in a famous episode of *Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre* (Book II. 1, 2) he constructs both a doctrine, a comparative history, and a practical application, of religion upon this basis. The religions of the world are measured by the kind of reverence out of



which they grew. Easiest and lowest was the "reverence for what is above us," found in all the ethnic religions; then the "reverence for what is beside us," the religion of philosophers; highest and most difficult, the Christian "reverence for what is beneath us." But all three "reverences" are needed, for out of them springs the "highest reverence of all, the reverence for oneself," and this is alone "the true religion." Goethe's self-reverence" is no egoistic self-regard, but an "awe," like Wordsworth's, before the spirit of man; and it is inspired by no complacent admiration for man's past achievements, but by the sense of his illimitable destiny. "The more thou feel'st thyself a man, the more like thou becomest to the gods!" Truly to revere oneself was thus, for Goethe, to have also reverence for what is above us, beside us, and beneath us; to revere the divine in the creative power of the universe, in the splendour of Nature, in the genius of poets and heroes and saints, in sorrow, misery, and tears; and truly to revere these was to be secure from shallow pride, and yet to have in one the root of the resolutely noble life which frustrates Mephistopheles and wins the help, if any there be, of angels. There are heights of faith and hope and love which the religious teaching of Goethe cannot reach, but it remains one of the loftiest expressions of that which remains unassailable in religion when theologies change and pass. "I have many times come in contact with it and been ennobled," wrote George Meredith of *Das Göttliche*, Goethe's great song of Man, who "alone can achieve the impossible." "This is the hymn for men. . . . All other prophecy is insolence."

## APPENDIX

### SOME BOOKS FOR FURTHER STUDY

No serious study of any part of Goethe's work is possible in English. The authoritative Weimar edition of his works is the product of the best Goethe scholarship of our day, and in every way unexceptionable, but beyond most private means. Good separate editions, annotated and otherwise, of *Faust*, the chief dramas and novels, the *Gedichte*, *Herrmann und Dorothea*, abound. The texts are mostly to be had, for a few pence each, in the Reklam-bibliothek.

At the head of the English translations may be put Carlyle's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. *Faust*, the usual goal (and too often the terminus) of English Goethe study, cannot be adequately translated. The best makeshift is probably still Bayard Taylor's version, much admired by Germans. Miss A. Swanwick's has also merit. The reader of the lyrics has little choice. Sir T. Martin's version of the *Poems and Ballads* is the work of a deft versifier.

Among biographies, the fullest, and in some respects best, by Bielschowsky, is accessible in a not very good translation. Lewes's *Life*, admirable for its time, has been rendered largely obsolete by the accumulation of new material. Seeley's lectures on Goethe belong, with Carlyle's essays, to the best that has been written in English on the poet. Special aspects of his life and work are treated by various scholars in the Transactions of the English Goethe Society (London), and of the Manchester Goethe Society. Professor Robertson's *Goethe and the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge Manuals) is a scholarly résumé somewhat larger in scale than the present volume.

Of the German Goethe literature even the baldest summary cannot here be attempted. It must suffice to refer the student, in addition to the works mentioned in the Preface, to the excellent select bibliography in the last edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (by Professor Robertson), and to that, less recent and less full, in the *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie* (by Professor M. Bernays).

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